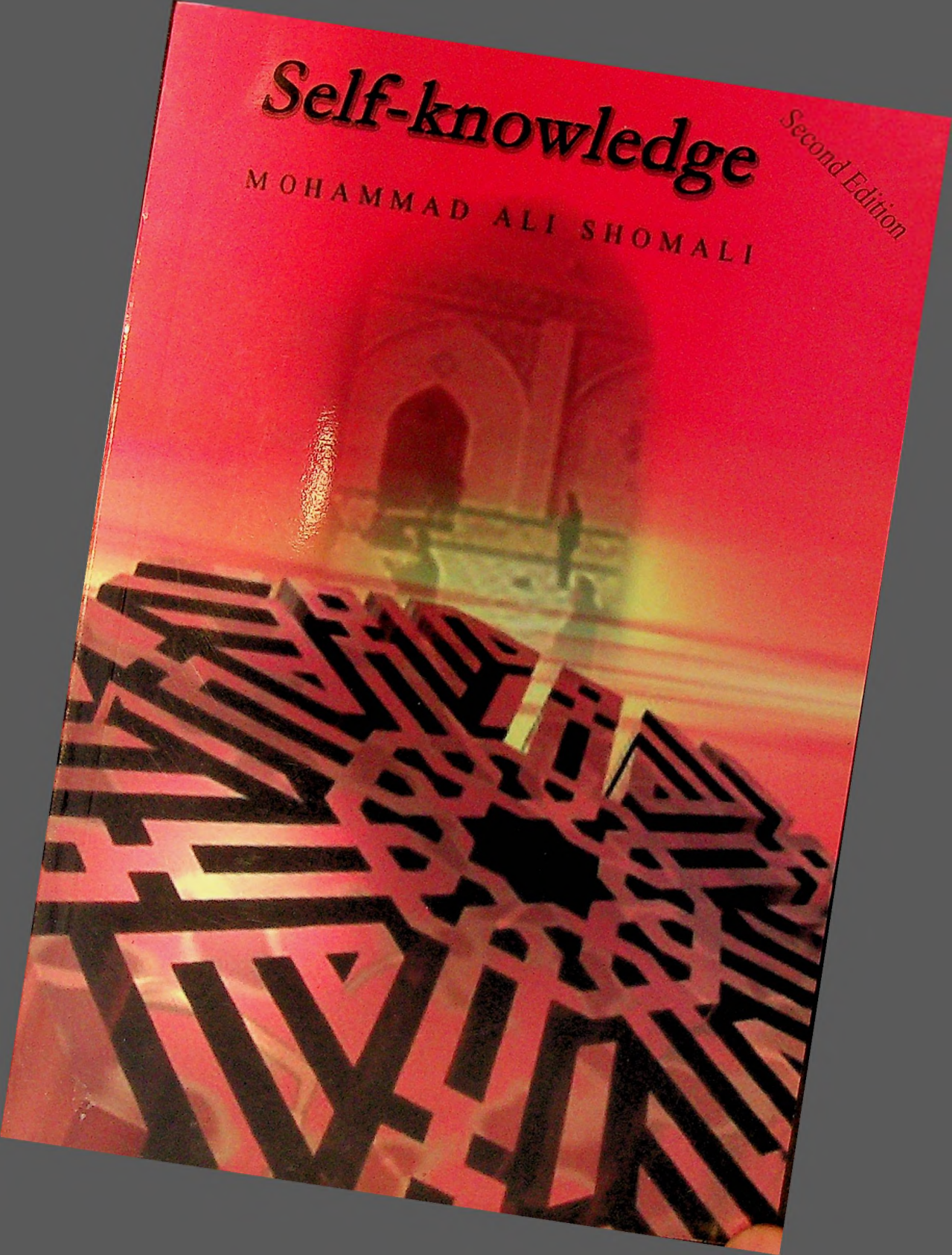
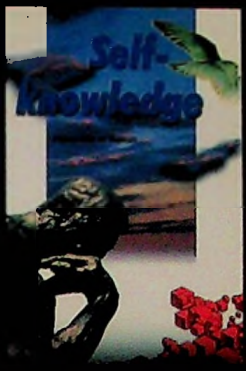
Self-knowledge

Second Edition

MOHAMMAD ALI SHOMALI





This book is an invitation to a journey, an interior journey of discovery in quest of a lost treasure containing the most precious jewels of the creation. The map which shows the way is to be found in the message of God for mankind, a way which is also indicated by the internal compass in every heart.

The journey begins with an inquiry into the nature of the spirit and its virtues and vices, and we are led to an understanding that man has the potential to be the representative of God on earth. If we pay heed to our origin and present conditions, and if we arrive at a sufficient understanding of our ultimate goal, the kinds of knowledge that are obtained on the journey will help us to make wise choices about the course our lives may take.

Self-knowledge was written in English and has been translated into Spanish, Indonesian and Kiswahili. While it retains the style of a text of fourteen lessons, it is engaging and lively rather than pedantic.

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In the Name of God,
the Compassionate the Merciful

Self-knowledge

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Mohammad Ali Shomali, PhD

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Introduction

Perhaps no school of thought has emphasized the nobility and value of humanity to the extent that Islam has. In Islam, man has the highest possibilities for perfection and closeness to Allah. The divine spirit is breathed into him and he is the representative of Allah on earth. Man will be satisfied with nothing short of closeness to Allah and His pleasure. Nothing can calm the spirit of man but the remembrance of Allah. He can find no rest, but in meeting Allah.

The value of man is due to his voluntary relationship to the absolute Truth and to the degree of his similarity with that Truth. Both rebellious humanism and despairing pessimism are distorted perspectives on this jewel of creation. The "straightpath" of the Glorious Qur'an, which passes between these two extremes, is servitude and worship of Allah. According to Islam, all perfections and values may be traced back to this, for it is only by servitude and worship of Allah that man can realize his true status and move without interruption toward the Source of the Light. The creation and strengthening of the spirit of servitude to Allah in man withers the roots of all moral vices and adorns him

with all beauties. This is the quick route, the profound and miraculous way prescribed by the Glorious Qur'an for the training of man. Could anything less than this be expected of the Glorious Qur'an, the final message of Allah for mankind?

The Noble Prophet, may the Peace and blessing of Allah be with him and with his household, actually shows that a pure servant of Allah can display all conceivable human perfections. On the one hand, he invited people to *tawhid* saying, "Say there is no god but Allah and you will be felicitous," and on the other hand, hesaid, "I have been sent to complete noble characters." How beautifully *tawhid* is interwoven with virtue, and faith with practice. What a religion this is, that ties together doctrine with jurisprudence and morals, individual affairs with social affairs, piety with economic development, and mysticism (*'irfan*) with politics! It is so amazing to find these dimensions interrelated that one wonders how is possible for a person with a bit of information about Islam, who has tasted its comprehensiveness, to seek another way of life?

In this small book, considering these points, an attempt has been made to express the intellectual and doctrinal foundations of the Islamic moral system and to show the relationship between self-knowledge and knowledge of God, and between self-improvement and closeness to God. We hope that once one has realized the need for knowledge and improvement of the self, one will feel the need for spirituality in the depths of his soul and will continue his quest for an even deeper understanding of religion.

Our book begins with a chapter on the importance of self-knowledge. After introducing the subject of

self-knowledge, we explain its importance in the Glorious Qur'an and Islamic traditions (*hadiths*).

The second chapter includes discussions of six benefits of self-knowledge. The first is that through knowledge of one's abilities and limitations one may avoid both egocentric arrogance and a despairing underestimation of one's self. The second is that one may come to recognize his own intrinsic worth and the unworthiness of his own base desires. Related to this point there is a discussion of nobility of spirit (*karāmat al-nafs*). The third benefit is an understanding that one's being is composed of two parts, body and spirit, the latter of which is the most important and most deserving of our care. Therefore, we should take heed of all our thoughts, words and deeds, knowing that they have effects on the spirit. Both ethics and jurisprudence provide guidance in this area, each in its own way. The fourth benefit is an understanding that one is not a product of mere chance, but that each of us has been created for a purpose, and that consequently, each of us should discover his mission, and orient his life accordingly. The fifth is that self-knowledge leads to a deeper appreciation of the role of consciousness in self-improvement. After discussing how things enter our awareness, we conclude that special care should be taken to avoid the formation of detrimental habits. The sixth benefit is that self-knowledge is a gateway to the celestial kingdom (*malakūt*). Conscience and the ability to determine one's nature are two examples of phenomena within us that cannot be analyzed or justified according to material laws. In addition to material life, there are other forms of life, even in this world, and all of these non-material phenomena point the way to the celestial kingdom.

On the basis of the centrality of the spirit in discussions of self-knowledge (and in accordance with the third benefit mentioned in Chapter 2), the third chapter of our book examines the immateriality of the spirit and its independence from the body. Visions of the immaterial spirit by some of the great scholars of Islam of the present age are mentioned along with a discussion of the theoretical and practical dimensions of mysticism (*'irfan*).

The fourth chapter is about the value and nobility of human beings in Islam. The Islamic perspective on this issue is defended from criticisms by some Western intellectuals, and it is shown how the inherent nobility of man can be completed with the acquisition of virtue. Finally, the question of the comparative nobilities of God's creatures, including angels and humans, is studied.

In the fifth and sixth chapters, the Qur'anc perspective on the virtues and vices of human beings is presented along with a discussion of which types of traits of character may be acquired voluntarily, and a description of the picture of man to be found in the Glorious Qur'an.

One of the greatest possible human attributes is to be the representative of Allah on earth (*khalifat Allah*). The meaning and scope of this representation, and its two varieties, generative and legislative, are discussed in the seventh chapter with reference to relevant passages from the Glorious Qur'an.

One of the conclusions to be drawn from the discussions in the previous chapters is that man's perfection depends on the appropriate exercise of his free will. In the eighth chapter the topic of free will is investigated and the fallacy of fatalism and its destructive consequences are exposed.

After recognizing human freedom of will, we find that three factors are needed for its appropriate employment: power, desire and knowledge. The ninth chapter contains a discussion of these, with special attention given to the role of knowledge. The most important sorts of knowledge needed in this regard are five: knowledge of our origin, our present, our future, our ultimate goal and the way to reach this goal. These topics are taken up in the subsequent five chapters.

Chapter ten is about knowing God and our relation to Him. According to the Qur'an, it is not difficult to become certain of His existence. After knowing God, His benevolence and His freedom from all need, on the one hand, and our total dependence on Him, on the other, we come to an understanding that His commands are solely for our own benefit.

In the eleventh chapter some of the features of this world are mentioned. First, that in our present worldly sojourn we are completely dependent on Allah and subsequently on various material conditions. Second, we reflect upon the ephemeral character of the cosmos; and thirdly, the true nature of this life is seen to lack significance in itself, except insofar as it is the only opportunity we have to seek the countenance of Allah (*wajh Allah*).

The topic of the twelfth chapter is the afterlife, and it includes discussions of corporeal resurrection, the period between death and the resurrection (*barzakh*), heaven and hell, the relation between our deeds and divine rewards and punishments and the eternity of the afterlife.

There are two major questions which are taken up in the thirteenth chapter: What is the purpose of creation? and subsequently, What should we take to be the goal of our

life? Although the ultimate purpose of creation is not to benefit Allah, Who is completely needless, we may say that, at a certain level, the goal of creation is the perfect man or woman (*insan kamil*). From this it follows that we should adopt as our own goal, that of approximating this status to the extent we are able. The nearness to Allah of the perfect human being is elucidated in terms of its results: material blessings, social justice, freedom from all obstacles in the process of self-improvement, peace and confidence, entrance into the universe of light, guardianship (*wilayah*), complete knowledge and eternal happiness.

The last chapter is about how to reach our goal. In short, the Islamic program for reaching the ultimate goal is service to Allah, hence, we should strive to adapt our beliefs, our deeds and our characters to that which is pleasing to Him. There follow discussions of the necessity for personal investigation about basic religious doctrines, the ways to understand our duties to Allah and the need for purification of the heart. After personal investigation into the basic doctrines, we should take care that our understanding of Islam is in accordance with the Glorious Qur'an and the tradition (*sunnah*) of the Prophet and his household, Peace be with them, for which purpose we should refer to the *'ulama*.

There is also an appendix in which there is a discussion of philosophy of punishment according to Islam which is based on the view of man found in the Qur'an. Without going into the details of juridical reasoning, it is argued that the Islamic attitude toward punishment is more harmonious with essential human values than humanistic approaches to this topic.

More than half of the contents of this book were first taught to a group of students from Canada, the United States and the United Arab Emirates in a summer course in Jami'at al-Zahra, and the Imam Mahdi Institute, Qom and Mashhad, in 1994. This material was first published at the request of the Editor of *Tehran Times* in forty-nine installments in that newspaper the following winter and spring. In the summer of 1995, this material with some additional supplements were taught at Zahra Academy, Qom, to a group of students from Britain, France and Kenya. Praise be to Allah, these materials have met with such a favorable response from students that the directors of the above mentioned centers proposed that they be assembled into a book. Some further material was added, and the present work was prepared for publication.

While this work was written with the intention that it be used as a text, an attempt has been made to avoid the dull dry style typical of many textbooks, without sacrificing logical organization. The book has been prepared for English language readers, but it is recognized that for many of the readers, English may be a second language, and some readers may be teenagers, and for this reason a simple English style and vocabulary have been selected. The book has been revised several times, in order to avoid linguistic errors, and Dr. Muhammad Legenhausen has edited all of it, although it is possible that some mistakes remain.

The discussions contained in this book are based on the Glorious Qur'an, hadiths and clear rational arguments. The abundance of verses of the Qur'an and hadiths which are narrated make it possible for the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about the topics discussed. The Arabic texts

have been included, with vocalizations (*i'rab*), to serve to strengthen the Arabic of our younger readers and to provide direct access to the original sources.

We have frequently found it necessary to use our own translation of verses from the Glorious Qur'an, although we have tended to rely on M. H. Shakir's translation. Efforts have been made to provide sufficient documentation for the conclusions reached such that they should be acceptable to all Muslims, and some of them for non-Muslims, as well.

We have used the expression *the Glorious Qur'an* because it is more faithful to the Islamic conception expressed in Arabic as *al-Qur'an al-Majid* than the expression *the Holy Qur'an*. Likewise, we have used the expression *the Noble Prophet* which provides the best approximation to the Arabic *al-Nabi al-Akram*. We have placed the Arabic text of the verses (*ayat*) of the Glorious Qur'an in fancy brackets: ﴿ ﴾; while the *hadiths* are placed between the following symbols: « ». We have used the abbreviation (S) for "May the Peace and blessings of Allah be with him and with his household" following reference to the Noble Prophet, and (A.S.) for "Peace be with him/her/them" following reference to the other prophets and the members of the household of the Noble Prophet.

Finally, I would like to offer endless gratitude to Allah, the Almighty and Sublime, and thanks for the providence of the Imam of the Age (May Allah hasten his blessed advent). I would also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for all the scholars of Islam, especially to Ayatullah Shahid Mutahhari and Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi, without whose works this book could not have been written, and to extend my thanks to those who have so graciously

given their help and encouragement for the writing of this book, especially to the editor, and to the administration and students of Jami'at al-Zahra and Zahra Academy.

و آخر دعوانا أن الحمد للّه ربّ العالمين

Muhammad Ali Shomali
6 Safar 1417
23 June 1996

The Importance of Self-knowledge

When discussing a topic such as this, it is perhaps best to begin with its definition and an assessment of its importance. Let us then begin by defining some terms. In Arabic, self-knowledge is called «معرفة النفس». What is معرفة النفس or *(ma'rifat al-nafs)*? It is knowledge about ourselves, but what kind of knowledge? It is not the kind that has to do with knowing one's name, or father's name, or the place and date of one's birth. Self-knowledge deals with another aspect of our being. It is not related to our physical senses, rather it deals with the spiritual dimension of our lives.

When we speak of the different dimensions of the spirit, and of our being, we should not forget that the human being is fundamentally different from other beings. Although we are anchored to the animal world in many ways, here we wish to focus on that which separates us from animals and is not found in them.

To understand better why this topic is of such importance, perhaps it helps to quote a few verses of the Glorious Qur'an and hadiths on the subject.

There are many verses in the Glorious Qur'an which elaborate on the importance of معرفة النفس. One of these verses is found in *Surah al-Hashr*, where the Almighty Allah says:

﴿وَلا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ﴾

"And be not like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget their own souls; These it is that are the transgressors." (59:19)

Here the Lord is saying that forgetting Him causes us to forget ourselves in turn, and ultimately leads us to transgression.

There is a tradition which makes a similar point to that of this verse, but looks at the matter from another angle. This tradition is a very famous one, and it is difficult to find a book on ethics (اخلاق) which has not quoted it :

«مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فَقَدْ عَرَفَ رَبَّهُ»

"He who truly knows himself, has known his Lord."(1)

This tradition implies that self-knowledge implies knowledge about the Lord as well. Awareness of oneself leads to awareness of the Lord. And likewise, one who is oblivious of the Lord, is oblivious of himself. If one is determined to learn about one's Lord, then the best way to accomplish the task is to learn about oneself.

(1) *Mizan al-Hikmah*, Muhammad Muhammadi Rey Shahri, Vol. 6, p. 142, No. 11923, reported from *Ghurar al-Hikam*.

Another verse dealing with the topic is found in *Surah al-Ma'idah*, where Allah says:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ مَنْ ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ﴾

"O you who believe! Take care of yourselves; he who errs cannot hurt you when you are on the right path." (5:105)

In this verse Allah is telling us to take care of ourselves, to pay attention to ourselves, that we must be careful about the well-being of our spirits, that we must be aware of the diseases of our souls, and how to cure them. He also tells us that we should pay attention to our duties, made obligatory on us as Muslims. Then He says:

﴿لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ مَنْ ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ﴾

This means if we understand the way, that if we are faithful and committed believers, those who are misled will not harm us. From this we understand that our first duty is to take care of ourselves spiritually.

Sometimes a question may arise here about the relationship between the believer and society. Does the above verse mean that we should focus on ourselves and not pay any attention to the society at large? To answer this question let us see what Allamah Tabataba'i says on this topic in his landmark work, *Al-Mizan.*

This great interpreter and scholar of the Glorious Qur'an explains that what is meant here is that we should take care of ourselves, and be familiar with our social and private

duties, so that we can also be socially responsible. For instance, in Islam we are commanded to advise people to do good and forbid them from evil deeds. One who does not perform this duty is not considered a devout Muslim, the reason being that he is not helping the society to better itself.

So, in Islam taking care of oneself spiritually is closely interwoven with being concerned with the welfare of the society as well. Conversely, it is important to remember that the society can greatly influence a person, weakening or strengthening one's faith.

Another question that may come up is, "Are we responsible for guiding non-Muslims as well?" The answer is an unequivocal yes, although the most important thing before doing that is to conduct oneself in such a pious, righteous manner that others are able to see the immense practical benefits of being a faithul Muslim. In inviting non-Muslims to Islam, we are continuing the job entrusted to the noble Prophet (S) in his lifetime. It is also a duty demanded by our love for our fellow human beings. If we have found the way and the light, we should invite others to immerse themselves in the light and its blessings as well.

After performing our personal and social duties, those who are still disbelieving and those who still insist on erring, will not be harmful to us. Perhaps they will bother you, and at most they may kill you, but they will not be able to take your faith away from you. On the contrary, these pressures strengthen your faith.

Returning to our main theme, the third verse on the importance of self-knowledge is found in *Surah Ha-Mim-Sajdah:*

﴿سَنُرِيهِمْ اٰيَاتِنَا فِى الْاٰفَاقِ وَفِىٓ اَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتّٰى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ اَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ﴾

"We will soon show them our signs in the universe and in their own souls, until it becomes quite clear to them that it is the Truth." (41:53)

Allah says that very soon we will show them our signs, but what are these signs and where will they be found ? Allah tells us that these signs are found in two places:

في الافاق و في انفسهم meaning in the external world and in their own souls. This *verse* tells us that by considering these signs which are within our own selves and which are in the universe, it will become completely clear that Allah truly exists.[1] According to some interpretations this fact will not only be *true*, but will be the *truth* itself. It is important to understand the distinction between these two expressions; it is the same when we say that Imam Ali (A.S.) is not only *just* but that he is *justice* meaning that justice was embodied in Imam Ali (A.S.).

Let us continue exploring the reasons the topic is so vital to our conduct in life. Once again we shall rely on the Glorious Qur'an for guidance. In everyday life when we purchase a new appliance or a gadget, we immediately turn to its manual for guidance in correctly operating it, believing

(1) Allamah Tabataba'i describes two possibilities about this verse. Firstly, he says that this verse is about (the truth of) the Glorious Qur'an and then he continues to say that it is possible to consider it to be about Allah. The same possibilities are studied in *Tafsir Nemuneh,* but the second is preferred. See *Al-Mizan*, Vol. 17, pp. 404, 405 and *Tafsir Nemuneh*, Nasir Makarim Shirazi, Vol. 20, pp. 330-332.

that its manufacturer is the best source of guidance. So it seems quite logical for a Muslim to turn to the Glorious Qur'an for instructons on correct conduct in life, convinced that the Maker and Creator of human beings is also the best source of guidance in learning about the immensely complex nature of human beings.

Another verse pertaining to our topic is found in *Surah al-Dhariyat*:

﴿وَ فِی ٱلۡأَرۡضِ ءَایَاتٞ لِّلۡمُوقِنِینَ وَ فِیٓ أَنفُسِكُمۡ أَفَلَا تُبۡصِرُونَ﴾

"And There are signs on the earth for those who are certain. And in your own souls (too); will you not then see?"(51: 20, 21)

We learned that Allah has two kinds of signs, the ones in the external, physical world, and those within ourselves. Verse 20 deals with those signs that have to do with the physical realm. In it the Almighty God tells us that there are signs on the earth for those who believe.

Immediately a question arises: why should those who already believe need the reassurances of such signs, and why should those who are not believers in God remain oblivious of them, yet more in need of them?

The answer given by great scholars of Islam is that those who do not believe in a creator as the Lord and Sovereign of the universe, also tend not to look or pay attention to that which is before them remaining for the most part oblivious of signs which are readily discernable to believers.

In the following verse, 21 of *Surah al-Dhariyat*, the Lord says:

"And in your own souls (too); will you not then see?"

This verse calls to our attention the need to look for these signs within ourselves. We are clearly and unambigiously told that there are signs in the external world as well, and these are sources of guidance for us.

From these verses it becomes clear to us that Muslims are urged not to focus on their souls to the exclusion of the physical, material world; and conversely, not to think that material affairs are all that matter.

In India for instance, there are people who try to strengthen the power of their souls in order to enable themselves to perform certain deeds not ordinarily possible. But in so doing, they lose touch with the everyday life of the planet. That is not what faithful Muslims are commanded to do. Muslims are told the two go hand in hand and are complimentary to each other.

Whether a scientist is working on a project in the laboratory, or a person is performing the most menial of tasks to earn an honorable living, he or she is carrying out one of God's commandments.

It is again, one of the most distinct characteristics of Islam that two worlds are never separated.

In today's world, in Western societies in particular, we see countless examples of people who are totally alienated from themselves, seeking all in the material life.

In more extreme cases, the alienation from the self has progressed to such a degree that being alone becomes painful and undersirable. Why? Because when such a person is alone, in a way he has lost contact with the external world, which is all he has. So being alone with his soul and spirit, he has to face a world which has no meaning to him, and

matters not to him. In trying to escape the inevitable loneliness, many resort to mind-altering drugs, such as alcohol and narcotics.

A person with a healthy spirit can be alone yet not lonely. One who has foresaken a part of himself, his spirit, his consciousness, when alone, seeks to destroy it, rather than face that which is excruciatingly painful; thus resorting to drugs becomes an easy escape route.

This is one reson why some societies use solitary confinement as a method of punishment for hardened criminals who are already serving life sentences and have nothing to lose by further acts of violence.

But when a faithful Muslim is alone by himself, he is not lonely. As a matter of fact being alone is prized by faithful Mulims. It gives one an opportunity to reflect, to pray, to re-assess one's shortcomings and strengths, and to seek guidance from the Lord.

There is a hadith from Imam Sajjad (A.S.) in which the Imam is quoted as saying:

«لَوْ مـاتَ مَـنْ بَـيْنَ اَلْمَشْـرِقِ وَ اَلْـمَغْرِبِ لَـمَا اَسْـتَوْحَشْتُ بَعْدَ اَنْ يَكُوْنَ اَلْقُرْآنُ مَعِى»

"If all between the East and West were to die, I would not feel lonely as long as the Qur'an was with me."(1)

Once again we shall turn to the hadiths to further explore this topic. This invaluable heritage has been left to us by the

(1) *Usul al-Kafi, Kitab Fadl al-Qur'an,* Muhammad Ya'qub Kulayni, No. 13.

scholars who instinctively knew the eternal value of observing the speech and deeds of the Noble Prophet and Imams, and recorded for posterity this living example of the perfect Muslim and human being.

Earlier we discussed a famous hadith which has reached us in two similar versions:

«مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ [فَقَدْ] عَرَفَ رَبَّهُ»

There is however, no difference in meaning:

*"Whoever knows himself (his soul or spirit) knows [*or *has known] his Lord."*(1)

Imam Ali (A.S.) is also quoted on the subject, stressing the importance of معرفة النفس:

«مَعْرِفَةُ ٱلنَّفْسِ أَنْفَعُ ٱلْمَعَارِفِ»

"Knowledge of oneself (self-knowledge) is the most beneficial knowledge of all."(2)

This again tells us that knowing oneself leads to knowing one's Lord and all that it entails.

The second hadith on the topic from Imam Ali (A.S.) reads:

«عَجِبْتُ لِمَنْ يُنْشِدُ ضَالَّتَهُ وَقَدْ أَضَلَّ نَفْسَهُ فَلاَ يَطْلُبُهَا»

"I wonder at the person who urgently searches

(1) Mizan al-Hikmah, Vol. 6, p. 142, No. 11923, reported from *Ghurar al-Hikam.* See also *Bihar al-Anwar,* Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, Vol. 2, p. 32, No. 22 and Vol. 95, p. 456, No. 1.

(2) Mizan al-Hikmah, Vol. 6, p. 140, No. 11903, reported from *Ghurar al-Hikam.*

for that which he has lost, but he has lost his soul and is not searching for it."(1)

The third hadith from Imam Ali (A.S.) on self-knowledge is:

«عَجِبْتُ لِمَنْ يَجْهَلُ نَفْسَهُ كَيْفَ يَعْرِفُ رَبَّهُ»

"I wonder how a person who ignores himself (his soul), can know his Lord."(2)

The fourth hadith from Imam Ali (A.S.) is:

«كُلَّما زَادَ عِلْمُ ٱلرَّجُلِ زَادَ عِنايَتُهُ بِنَفْسِهِ وَ بَذَلَ في رِياضَتِها وَصَلاحِها جُهْدَهُ»

"Whenever the knowledge of a man increases, his attention to his soul also increases and he tries his best to train, and purify it."(3)

Here is yet another hadith on the subject from Imam Ali (A.S.):

«غايَةُ ٱلمَعْرِفَةِ أَنْ يَعْرِفَ ٱلمَرْءُ نَفْسَهُ»

"The ultimate knowledge of a man is to know himself."(4)

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(1) Mizan al-Hikmah, Vol. 6, p. 141, No. 11911, reported from *Ghurar al-Hikam.*

(2) Mizan al-Hikmah, Vol. 6, p. 142, No. 11925, reported from *Ghurar al-Hikam.*

(3) Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Vol. 11, p. 323, No. 16

(4) Mizan al-Hikmah, Vol. 6, p. 140, No. 11902, reported from *Ghurar al-Hikam.*

The Benefits of Self-knowledge

One of the practical benefits of self-knowledge is to allow a person to become intimately familiar with his or her abilities and aptitudes. This is of immense help to a person in life, preventing one, for instance, from selecting a field of study or job inherently unsuitable to one's God-given abilities.

It also is of great value to a person to comprehend that he is not, theologically speaking, self-existent. This is important, since it helps a person to understand that no matter how powerful or high one's station in life is, there are numerous events in life over which one has no control.

Of even more importance is the spiritual value of self-knowledge, in that one who has self-knowledge is much less likely to indulge in arrogance, undue pride, and other such destructive behaviours. One who is closely in touch with his own self, and his Lord, is also much better equipped to improve those aspects of himself which can be improved, and do indeed need improvement. One can better appraise one's weaknesses and strengths, and be grateful for one's

blessings.

Self-knowledge is a highly effective system of self-improvement; one can even say that معرفة النفس is in some ways similar to the "bio-feedback" therapies many physicians in some Western countries recommend to patients whose active participation in the healing process is needed, or to patients for whom modern medicine has not found a cure.

Another very important benefit of معرفة النفس is that a faithful Muslim knows that he or she is an extremely precious creation of Allah, and does not see himself simply as yet another animal with some basic needs to satisfy and strive for.

Here we are going to turn for a moment to a rather philosophical discussion to better understand this point.

Most people seem to instinctively realize that every being has a different level of perfection, closely matched to that being's inherent characteristics and purpose in the scheme of things in the universe. For instance, an ordinary shade tree which does not bear fruits compared with an apple tree which does the latter as well as the former, is considered of a lower status of perfection in the scheme of things. It is for this reason that an apple tree in an orchard, which grows enough leaves to provide ample shade but for some reason does not bear fruit, is most likely cut down and replaced with one that does. It has not lived up to its potential, its level of perfection. In other words, although the tree remains useful in many respects, it has failed in that aspect which distinguishes it from the less perfect trees which do not bear fruits.

The same analogy works when comparing humans and

animals. If a human being does not exhibit characeristics which rise above those shared with animals, i.e., eating, drinking, seeking comfort, shelter, pleasure, and the continuation of the race, then that human being has not reached his or her full potential, or perfection.

To summarize this point, one can logically claim that the second most important benefit of معرفة النفس is recognition of these innate, exclusive characteristics, allowing one to see clearly what they are. Such a human being will not allow himself to be corrupted and brought down to the level of animals, having understood his status in the scheme of things, and in the eyes of his Lord. Whoever discovers his true value will not commit any sins. If we truly understand what a precious being we are, our indescribably high potential, and the heights to which we can soar, then we will not allow ourselves to be shackled by sin, and held down.

Speaking of human beings who have risen to the heights of perfection, let us now see what that man of God and His servant, Imam Ali (A.S.), says on the subject.

The following two hadiths are taken from *Nahj al-Balaghah*:

«مَنْ كَرُمَتْ عَلَيْهِ نَفْسُهُ هَانَتْ عَلَيْهِ شَهَوَاتُهُ»

"Whoever views himself with respect, views his desires with disdain."(1)

In other words, the Imam is saying that once a person becomes aware of himself, understands how precious he or she is, and the worthy goals he can set for himself, his own desires appear light, insignificant, and unworthy to him.

(1) *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Maxim 441.

Thus, fighting temptation becomes easier, and this is one of the benefits of self-knowledge.

The second hadith is from the letter that Imam Ali sent his son, Imam Hasan (A.S.), advising him on matters important to him. The words are like precious jewels, and we, the ordinary Muslims are more in need of hearing and remembering such advice than the Imam, to whom the letter was addressed:

«وَأَكْرِمْ نَفْسَكَ عَنْ كُلِّ دَنِيَّةٍ وَإِنْ ساقَتْك الى الرَّغائِبِ، فَإِنَّكَ لَنْ تَعْتاضَ بِمَا تَبْذُلُ مِنْ نَفْسِكَ عِوَضاً ولا تَكُنْ عَبْدَ غَيْرِكَ وَقَدْ جَعَلَكَ اللّهُ حُراً»

"Keep yourself above every low thing even though it may take you to your desires, because what you will receive in return is nowhere near worth that which you will have to give of yourself. Do not let anything enslave you, for Allah created you free."(1)

In the Glorious Qur'an we find verses which point to the people who are totally lost:

﴿إِنَّ ٱلْإِنسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا ٱلصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ﴾

"Most assuredly man is in loss, except those who believe and do good, and enjoin each other to the truth and patience." (103:1-3)

So, as we see in both the Glorious Qur'an and the hadiths, great emphasis has been placed on the issue of

(1) *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Letter 31.

self-knowledge and on the resultant freedom which ensues. Since there are many good interpretations written on the Glorious Qur'an, here we will try to provide a careful examination of the words of Imam Ali (A.S.) on the subject as well.

In the second hadith, we find the word "دنيّة", meaning low things or deeds which are inherently ugly and demeaning. The Imam warns us of the grave danger of such deeds to one's soul, for they enslave the spirit and corrupt the soul. He warns us to be ever-vigilant against actions which, although pleasurable, comforting, or convenient, are so demeaning that one loses much, much more spiritually than one gains in momentary pleasures or comforts.

In the last sentence of the second hadith, the Imam tells his son and us that human freedom is such a precious, prized gift of the Almighty God, that any deed, however pleasurable or convenient, which leads to enslavement, is an extremely bad deal. The momentary pleasure passes and the grievous damage persists.

Now let us continue on to another major benefit of self-knowledge. Most people instinctively realize that there are two distinct features to their being: the material, worldly aspect, and the spiritual aspect. Most however, do not understand or believe that the latter is incomparably more important. But in Islam, spiritual affairs rule supreme. One can be an enormously productive member of the society in material terms, and yet be considered unworthy to be called a Muslim if one is corrupt; while it is unthinkable to be a pious and spiritually high person and yet be considered unworthy to be called a Muslim simply because one is poor. So it is no wonder that being aware of and guarding against

diseases of the spirit is so stressed in Islam. This extends to all actions, however seemingly insignificant.

There is a pervasive misconception that some deeds do not adversely affect one's soul because they seem unimportant. But we are taught in Islam that every deed, every word one utters, has an effect on one's soul and spirit, reinforcing the faith and purifying the spirit, or undermining the faith and harming one's soul. Words spoken to guide a lost soul are valuable both to the speaker and to the person gone astray. They each benefit in different ways. So there must not be any doubt among faithful Muslims that in Islam, we are taught that every action, every word has consequences for our spiritual well-being, and must not be dismissed as insignificant and trivial.

When The Noble Prophet (S) sent Imam Ali (A.S.) to Yemen, he said:

«يا عَلِيُّ لا تُقاتِلَنَّ اَحَداً حَتّى تَدْعُوَهُ وَ اَيْمُ اَللّٰهِ لَئِنْ يَهْدِيَ اَللّٰهُ عَلىٰ يَدَيْكَ رَجُلاً خَيْرٌ لَكَ مِمّا طَلَعَتْ عَلَيْهِ اَلشَّمْسُ وَ غَرُبَتْ»

"O Ali! Do not fight with anyone until you invite him [to Islam] and I swear by Him that if Allah guides one person through you, it will be more precious than all over which the sun rises and sets."(1)

To round up our discussion of this benefit, it may be said that we are clearly and unambiguously told that the most important dimension of our being is the soul, and our actions and thoughts directly affect this prized gift of God.

Some might consider it a bit extreme when told that

(1) *Mizan al-Hikmah,* Vol. 10, p. 325, No. 20835.

Islam also teaches us that thoughts also must be watched for their effect on the spirit.

We are also taught that in most of the cases however wrong or demeaning one's thoughts may be, so long as one does not act on them, one is not severely taken to task by the Lord. But since deeds have roots in the spirit, Muslims are admonished against dismissing the importance of thoughts in forming lives. In Islamic jurisprudence, except in extremely rare cases which are very narrowly defined, one is not punished for mere thoughts or beliefs. However, from an ethical point of view, one should try to remove vices from one's character.

In Islam the immensely complex nature and nurture of human beings is subjected to two rather distinct set of rules:

- *Fiqh* (فقه), Islamic jurisprudence;
- *Akhlaq* (اخلاق), ethics.

The obligatory rules of *Fiqh* are concerned with the minimally necessary conditions of human perfection. For humans aspiring to new heights, higher levels of perfection, Divine guidance is provided in the second set of rules, *Akhlaq* which governs both the world and the soul and provides us with all the prescriptions we need to reach the highest levels of perfection. Thus, the two sets of rules governing Muslims' lives, are each meant for a different purpose. For instance, while idle chatter is not prohibited in *fiqh*, morally it is considered a waste of precious time and not helpful to the spiritual development of the person, and thus prohibited.

Another example which helps to illustrate the difference better is the صـــلاة اللـــيل, (night prayers), which is highly recommended to all Muslims; and while not mandatory in

fiqh, it is necessary in *akhlaq*. The reason being that those aspiring to new heights, and striving for perfection, are expected to prepare and develop spiritually by performing certain tasks, such as rising in the majestic dark of the night to offer prayers to the Lord of the universe.

So *fiqh* mainy comprises basic and necessary laws whose obedience is required from all Muslims, and is considered the first step towards development. To commit oneself to the laws of *fiqh* is not a difficult undertaking, as Islam itself is not a difficult religion.

However, there are always individuals who observe the mandatory laws of *fiqh*, yet upon getting a glimpse of the Light, want nothing more than to fly to the Flame. For these enraptured souls, Islam has provided *akhlaq*. They then make mandatory upon themselves deeds which are highly recommended, or *mustahabb* (مستحبّ). In addition to performing these recommended tasks, they obey other laws of *akhlaq*, and make unlawful upon themselves that which is not forbidden in *fiqh*, yet somehow might be an obstacle on the way to the Light, to perfection.

Therefore there might be thoughts or spiritual qualities which are not directly forbidden in *fiqh*, but prohibited in *akhlaq*. One destructive thought or quality which is not forbidden in itself in *fiqh* is jealousy, which is not a punishable offense in Islamic jurisprudence, nor are we taken to task for such thoughts in the Hereafter. Yet actions issuing from jealousy might be forbidden. The Noble Prophet said:

«إِذَا تَطَيَّرْتَ فَامْضِ، وَ إِذَا ظَنَنْتَ فَلاَ تَقْضِ، وَ إِذَا حَسَدْتَ فَلاَ تَبْغِ»

> *"If you are pessimistic, then do not let that keep you from continuing, and if you are suspicious about someone, do not judge on that basis, and if you are envious of someone, do not persecute him."*(1)

Jealousy has been called "the prison of the soul"(2), and such an impediment to one's spiritual develpment that there is no place for it in *akhlaq*.

We also can find examples of thoughts being the subject of both sets of rules governing the life of Muslims. One of these, considered one of the greatest sins which mostly manifests itself in one's thoughts, is despair of God's help. There are many hadiths regarding this subject and it is so grevious a sin that it is considered a form of disbelief in God. There are several reasons for this; and just from a psychological point of view, such a person, so lost in sin and so despondent of ever being forgiven by the Lord, has no practical incentive either to save himself, or to save the society from his future misdeeds. This feeling of despair, we are taught in Islam, is worse than the sins themselves.

Even in mandatory practical laws *(fiqh)*, Muslims are explicitly forbidden from ever losing hope in God's forgiveness. We are told that such despondent thoughts are one of the most effective weapons of Satan, who will rejoice at the specter of a lost soul, despondent of his Lord's mercy and forgiveness. Such people are told to truly and sincerely repent, amend for past deeds to the extent possible, and have faith that the Almighty God will forgive them.

Another great sin, which also has to do mostly with one's

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(1) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 77, p. 153.

(2) Mizan al-Hikmah, Vol. 2, p. 422, No. 3902.

thought, is to think oneself free of the possibility that God will not exact punishment for one's misdeeds. To consider oneself the master schemer somehow able to get away with sin.

In the Glorious Qur'an we find:

﴿وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ ٱللَّهُ وَٱللَّهُ خَيْرُ ٱلْمَاكِرِينَ﴾

"They planned and Allah planned, and He is the best of Planners." (3:54)

So we are told not to think ourselves beyond God's justice, and not to scheme and deceive, for it is all in vain.

One of the words used in this verse is مكر (*makr*) which when used for man, means deception; but when used in connection with Almighty God connotes planning in an innocent, yet capable manner. An example of this is found in the account of the Quraysh's attempt on the Noble Prophet's life. They thought their plan carefully through, and in order to spread the blame and avoid the consequences, sent one man from each tribe to carry out the assassination. They were certain that this scheme would prevent the kin and followers of Muhammad (S) from declaring war on all tribes should the culprits be found. But by God's Grace, the Archangel Gabriel revealed their plans to the Prophet and Ali (A.S.) decided to occupy his bed, and the Prophet left town that night.

To conclude our discussion of this topic, the third major benefit of self-knowledge taught in Islam is to know that the spiritual aspect of our being is the most important one, and our spirits are influenced not only by our deeds but also by our ideas. So we must be on guard with respect to our

thoughts, and use our knowledge of ourelves to avoid the many pitfalls of the soul.

The fourth benefit of self-knowledge is to understand that we were not created by chance. If we deeply contemplate our own selves, our being, we come to the inevitable conclusion that it is God who created all, and we could not have come into existence by ourselves or simply as a result of our parents' union, had it not been part of His Plan. Naturally man is always in search of a reason for his existence, his being, but through معرفة النفس and contemplating creation and the goals of creation, one realizes that we are each unique, with a mission in life. We were not created by chance and in vain.

Armed with this knowledge, one is well equipped to strive and to realize the purpose of one's creation, to incessantly seek to return to Him through deeds which are dear to Him, Godly acts which are the cornerstone of religion and give life meaning.

The fifth benefit is the tremendous help one receives in truly appreciating the element of consciousness, which is critical to the process of spiritual development and purification. Through self-knowledge, we are able to cultivate and develop our self-awareness, our consciousness; otherwise external factors may come to influence us in ways we cannot control.

One of the characteristics of man is that with respect to changing matters and constant ones, he is not always aware of the latter. This is so that our attention is not fixed and held on constants and we are therefore able to take measure of new things. Allah has made us in this way to enable us to attend to new matters; otherwise our attention would be

fixed on only one thing. (Of course, it is possible for us to strengthen our spirit to pay close attention to more than one thing at the same time.) For example when we first put on a watch we are aware of it, but after a while we lose consciousness of it until we want to know the time; or we feel the weight of our clothes at first and then we neglect it. We feel hungry or not hungry through the changes of the size of our stomach.

We should utilize this psychological point in our spiritual lives. There are times when major catastrophes can befall one's soul, without the person being aware of it. There are instances of people who are totally lost in life and not even aware of the fact. This can progress to the extent of total disbelief in God, without the person being aware of the change in himself, in his consciousness. This is because humans are created in such a way that they are much more aware of sudden changes than subtle ones. One could undergo drastic changes in beliefs and yet these changes not be readily obvious to the person. A good example is lying. Most humans, specially in the early stages of childhood, cannot tell a lie, especially if it is the very first time they have engaged in such behavior, without feeling uneasy, uncomfortable, and later, remorseful. As one repeats this behavior, however, the soul becomes inured to the effects, and one can lie, cheat, and deceive with little effort or discomfort. Even worse, one may not at all be conscious of the change one has gone through. Self-knowledge lets one see these changes coming, giving the person the opportunity to correct such character defects, and once again tread the path of God.

With most people, however, only cataclysmic events in

their personal lives can cause them to become aware of these character defects. With those armed with معرفة النفس it will not come to that. By paying attention to one's consciousness and caring for it, one can gain awareness of the subtle changes that occur in the inner life and take corrective steps when needed.

The Almighty God tells us in the Glorious Qur'an:

﴿ثُمَّ كَانَ عَاقِبَةَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسَآءُوا ٱلسُّوٓأَىٰٓ أَن كَذَّبُوا بِـَٔايَاتِ ٱللَّهِ وَكَانُوا بِهَا يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ﴾

"Then it was the fate (end) of those who did evil, to reject Divine signs, and become accustomed to mocking them." (30:10)

So as human beings, given consciousness and free will, we can destroy ourselves or we can attain happiness and peace if we are aware of ourselves, our actions, and most importantly aware of the Almighty God at all times.

The sixth benefit of self-knowledge is that it serves as a gateway to the non-material or spiritual world. Once we pass through the gates we find many things which from a strictly materialistic point of view do not make sense. An example of this is the conscience, which cannot be justified or explained by merely materialistic laws. How wonderful it is that all human beings from time immemorial, regardless of up-bringing, culture, and religion hear the same call from within. People seem to instinctively realize what is right and what constitutes a wrong. Every person considers oppression and injustice as bad, and justice as good and desirable. Even oppressors themselves wish to be treated justly. It is said that even thieves, when dividing the loot, pick the one

among them they deem trustworthy to do the job.

Through self-knowledge we come to understand that all things except human beings have an inherent nature which cannot be changed. For instance, a stone is forever stone, no matter how many changes it goes though when different things are made of it. With human beings it is the exact opposite. Although we all inhabit more or less the same kind of a phyical body, we have different natures.

We are told that on the Day of Judgement, when the veil is finally lifted from before our eyes, we will see ourselves and others as they really are. Their true natures will appear. In the Glorious Qur'an we read:

﴿يَوْمَ تُبْلَى ٱلسَّرَائِرُ﴾

"On the day when hidden things will be made manifest." (86:9)

and there is another verse:

﴿يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِى ٱلصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجاً﴾

"The day on which the Trumpet shall be sounded so you shall come forth in hosts." (78:18)

According to hadiths, hosts means groups of people and other beings, grouped according to their true natures. Some might appear as dogs or monkeys. Some human beings could have fallen lower than a bug, while others could have ascended higher than angels. We learned that in Islam, human beings are not valued the same. One can through despicable deeds rank below the lowliest of species or conversely rise higher than angels, in the eyes of God.

According to some other world views, all human beings

are considered as one and the same. Zionists and their victims are considered as humans with the same rights and both have to be respected. But in Islam, there are two distinct levels of humanity, and therefore two distinct levels of laws, relationships, etc.

First, there are basic laws applied to all human beings, arising from their basic rights, their birth right for having been created human. The second level of laws are exclusively applied to real human beings, who through countless Godly deeds have risen to a level inaccessible to others who have not conducted themselves in a similar fashion. The underlying reason for this is that the relationship between the Creator and man is a very special one, with the Lord granting certain rights exclusively to those who tread His path.

One aspect of this relationship, aside from the laws, is the insight that the Almighty God grants the faithful, enabling them to understand people's true natures and characters in this life. There are also some awesome privileges granted to the righteous which have not even been granted to angels. Again, the reason seems to be that man, given free will, when exceedingly righteous and pious, is also accorded certain privileges denied to angels. For instance, when the Noble Prophet ascended to the Heavens in the majestic night of *Mi'raj* (Ascension), he was at times accompanied by the Archangel Gabriel; but there were places and dimensions of the universe which were denied the archangel, for, in his words, quoted by the Noble Prophet:

«لَوْ دَنَوْتُ أَنْمُلَةً لَاحْتَرَقْتُ»

"If I had gone even a fingertip further I would have been burnt."(1)

In the Glorious Qur'an we read that when the Noble Prophet (S) ascended to the Heavens he got as close as any created being could ever hope to the Lord of the universe:

﴿ثُمَّ دَنٰا فَتَدَلّٰى فَكٰانَ قٰابَ قَوْسَيْنِ اَوْ اَدْنٰى فَاَوْحٰى اِلٰى عَبْدِهٖ مٰا اَوْحٰى﴾

"Then he drew near, then he bowed, so he was the measure of two bows or closer still. And He revealed to His servant what He revealed." (53: 8-10)

Here we should not forget that in the Glorious Qur'an at times the Lord speaks to us in allegory, especially when matters are well over our heads. So the distance mentioned here should also be taken in the same vein, meaning that the Noble Prophet was only two stages beyond seeing the Lord of the universe in all His Majesty.

These and matters like them are learned through النفس معرفة. It is, as mentioned earlier, the gateway to the non-material, metaphysical world.

Thus, we reviewed some Islamic teachings regarding the widely divergent values of different human beings to their Creator and to each other. We also saw how self-knowledge helps open the gates of the spiritual world, presenting a breathtaking vista to those who step inside.

As for those who choose a different life, sinking deep, and drowning in the vortex of sin, the Glorious Qur'an says:

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(1) Al-Asfar al-Aqliyat al-Arba'ah, Sadr al-Din Shirazi, Vol. 6, p. 300.

﴿وَلَقَدْ ذَرَأْنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيراً مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا وَ لَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا وَ لَهُمْ أَذَانٌ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا أُولَئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْغَافِلُونَ﴾

"And certainly we have created for Hell many of the Jinn[1] and the men; they have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear; they are as cattle, nay, they are in worse error, they are the heedless ones." (7:179)

Those, who remain totally oblivious of their Lord and the spiritual aspects of themselves, are called "dead," by the Glorious Qur'an. Since we are taught that of the two aspects of our life, the physical, material life and the spiritual life, the latter is much, much superior, and is centred on faith and deed.

To be truly alive and aware in this world, we are taught in the Glorious Qur'an to believe in the Almighty God, His words, and His last Prophet:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَ لِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ﴾

"O' believers! Accept the words of Allah and the Prophet when he calls you to that which gives you life." (8:24)

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(1) Jinn (unseen beings) is the term the Glorious Qur'an applies to some beings which are not normally preceived by humans, which may result from the nature of these beings, e. g., they might be from other kinds of matter. They also have free will. So some of them are believers and some are disbelievers. See Ch. Five of this volume.

Some people only have the physical life, and therefore can comprehend only material, physical things; others have both the physical and spiritual lives, thus can understand both.

Given the immensely constructive role that religion, as a framework for conduct in this life, can play in people's lives, and the overall world view which it presents to the faithful to guide their lives, it is astounding that today a great number of people forsake their faiths. To some this is because they feel they will lose their "freedom" to do as they wish, that religion somehow takes away their freedom, and one would be a slave, so to speak. We are all slaves, in a way. Some to God, some to money, power, desires, etc. The way then to be truly free is to obey God and His commandments, and release oneself from other "gods". It is not an easy task satisfying many gods, but to please one, especially when the belief itself strengthens the person and releases one from limitations, is not a difficult undertaking.

The person who chooses God, is no longer a slave of others, but has reached a level of lordship. We see in hadiths that:

«اَلْعُبُودِيَّةُ جَوْهَرَةٌ كُنْهُهَا اَلرُّبُوبِيَّةُ»

"The servantship is a substance whose essence is the lordship."(1)

The Prophet of Islam was a slave of the Almighty God by choice. We also express this sentiment several times a day during our ritual prayers:

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(1) Mizan al-Hikmah, Vol. 6, p. 13, No. 11317.

«أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّداً عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ»

"I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger."

Yet this seemingly bonded man changed the history of the world. He successfully fought powers which opposed God, yet was honored to prostrate himself before Allah.

Anything but freedom is one's reward when one selects a life without religion, without a relationship with the Creator. The Glorious Qur'an warns us:

﴿أَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلٰهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلاً أَمْ تَحْسَبُ أَنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ أَوْ يَعْقِلُونَ إِنْ هُمْ إِلاَّ كَالأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلاً﴾

"Have you seen him who takes his low desires for a god? Will you then be a protector over him? Or do you think that most of them do hear or understand? They are nothing, but cattle, nay, they are straying further off the Path." (25:43-44)

﴿ضَرَبَ اللّٰهُ مَثَلاً رَجُلاً فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ مُتَشَاكِسُونَ وَ رَجُلاً سَلَماً لِرَجُلٍ هَلْ يَسْتَوِيَانِ مَثَلاً اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لاَ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

"Allah sets forth an example: There is a slave in whom are (several) partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition? (All) praise is due to Allah. Nay! most of them do not know." (39:29)

There are three couplets attributed to Imam Ali (A.S.) with which we will end our discussion. It seems only fitting, since the Imam's words eloquently show the importanace of self-knowledge:

«دَوٰائُكَ فِيكَ وَ مٰا تَبْصُرُ وَدٰاؤُكَ مِنْكَ وَ مٰا تَشْعُرُ
وَ أَنْتَ ٱلْكِتٰابُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ٱلَّذِى بِأَحْرُفِهِ يَظْهَرُ ٱلْمُضْمَرُ
أَتَزْعَمُ أَنَّكَ جِرْمٌ صَغِيرٌ وَفِيكَ ٱنْطَوَى ٱلْعٰالَمُ ٱلْأَكْبَرُ»

"The cure is with you, but you do not see,
And the illness is from you, but you are unaware. You are the clear book whose
letters make manifest the hidden.
Do you think you are some small mass
while within you there dwells a great world?"(1)

(1) *Insan Kamil,* Shahid Murtada Mutahhari, p. 203.

The Spirit

Having understood the importance of the spirit (ruh) and the spiritual life, it is natural to pursue our discussion with this topic, the spirit. The issue of spirit is one of the oldest problems confounding the human mind. Even the earliest human beings were aware of a non-material entity within them. They were aware of different states and levels of consciousness in their lives, and by comparing sleep and death with their normal awake state reached some preliminary conclusions. They were also cognizant of the fact that humans are different from animals, with the latter lacking free will and wisdom. Animals just seemed to follow their instincts. They also thought about dreams. Dreams which came true were especially intriguing. Without being able to articulate it, they had an inkling that this might be the result of a part of the person taking leave, traversing the future.

As human societies developed, such problems were delegated to philosophers who were good at thinking and reflecting. Philosophy confronted the issue by first asking: Is the spirit material or non-material? In other words, is this

phenomenon part of our bodies or not? Material things have specific properties, for instance they can be divided into smaller parts which can also be divided into parts once more, ad infinitum, if the means were available. They also knew that if a person lost a limb, he or she was essentially the same person, with a handicap. Their notions of themselves did not seem to suffer in the process. Thus, many philosophers concluded that the soul is independent of the body. This theory was further strengthened when they considered the notions of "I", "mine" and "me", as distinct features of the person. Is the person, this unit of a human being, material or non-material?

As noted with the loss of limb example, philosophers knew that humans even after losing parts of themselves were the same. We all seem to have an understanding of ourselves as a whole, as something which is not divisible, and which is simple and not compound. When we get our hair cut, we do not feel any less afterwards. That which remains besides our body and is not on the floor of the barbershop is what we are after.

Let us use another example to help clarify this illusive topic. When a person commits a crime, especially a heinous one such as masterminding mass killings, as the Nazis did in WWII, he is expected to be brought to justice, even if he committed the crimes half a century ago.

Science tells us that the average person's body cells are nearly all renewed every six years. For all practical purposes we are not physically the same person we were, say ten years ago. Why then should the Nazi officer, whose body bears little resemblance to the one which carried out the atrocities, be apprehended, tried, and punished? We

intuitively understand that we are not losing some parts of our being which must be replaced. The unity of identity which we feel is not justified only through physical continuity.(1)

So there seems to be universal recognition of the fact that, what animates a person is ultimately constant, and is held responsible for the whole of the person's body and spirit. Because the two are so closely interwoven, and because we humans are so deeply anchored in this physical, material world, we tend to identify with the body rather than the spirit. In Islam there is no doubt that the spirit is the essence of the person, and the body a vehicle for the manifestation of the soul in this world, and a means for its works.

There is a set of reasons proving the existence of the spirit through the study of our knowledge. If we prove that our knowledge is not material, it will be clear that we are not merely bodies. For example, it is obvious that a greater thing cannot be placed in a smaller thing. A big box can

(1) Some philosophers who deny the spiritual substance appeal to physical continuity to justify the unity of our identity. They say our body is gradually being changed with new parts, but this process is so slow that we do not feel any change in the unity and because of the continuity of our body we consider it the same. David Hume, for example, likens the body to a supposed ship, the Queen Mary, which moves from one port to another and all its parts successively are replaced. When this ship reaches the second port it has none of its original parts, but all spectators consider it the same, though wrongly. There are different objections to this idea in addition to what is expressed in the text. For example, according to this view, we need some unchanging spectators or judges to decide that the ship is the same, even if wrongly, and this role can only be played by the spirit which persists within us.

easily accommodate a smaller one put into it. The reverse does not hold. Then imagine gazing at a beautiful forest for a while, savoring all that stands before you. Later on when you remember the experience with all its grandeur, little thought is given to the size of the forest, which is, in a way, now stored within your memory. Whatever one might call it, the image, or the experience of the forest fits neatly within a person's mind which is rather limited in size. We wonder how a forest, with all its characteristics and size can fit into our consciousness.

The problem is not solved if we imagine small microfilms, for instance, which are pictures of what we see, and are in one way or another, stored in our minds. Even extremely small microfilms have dimensions, which, when added together, would soon leave no more room in our minds for anything else. Also when you have microfilms you are in need of some means to be able to interpret those microfilms. You also need some ability to understand things in their real sizes. There is a difference between seeing a small picture of a forest and seeing the forest itself.

This is a rather difficult issue which has puzzled many scientists. As a matter of fact, when a survey of top scientists, including Nobel laureates, was conducted recently, the vast majority, when asked what will be the most important field of research in the next decade, gave psychobiology as the answer.

It is somewhat well understood that neurons in our brains, through sensors, spread out like roots, pulses, electrical signals, if you will, by which they interact with billions of other cells. Brain waves are in this way measured, charted, and studied. Yet the nature of information storage

is not well understood.

The repeated actions of a person, for instance an athlete after intense training which involves repeated motions of the same kind, do indeed leave physical traces in the physiology of the brain; as a stream of water would after running down the same path for a while. This enables the athlete to perform extremely difficult tasks without "thinking" or great effort at coordination. Yet this explains only part of the process. This is the wiring system, so to speak, and not the process of cognition, information storage, and retrieval. In what form the athlete's skills are stored is still not understood.

The question occupying many minds is: Is the physical brain the gateway unto something else, or is it all there is, and the end of all that has to do with cognition? I hope we have understood how to answer this question without being engaged in technical discussions of philosophy.

There are many other ways to prove that knowledge is not material. For example, knowledge is not changeable, but every material thing is. For instance, today is Saturday. You have the knowledge that you are reading a book on self-knowledge this day. This knowledge is true today. When you think of it tomorrow, it will be the same. Your knowledge about this particular book will be the same after a week, a year, or say even twenty years later. When you forget something what this really means is that particular data have been lost which cannot be easily retracted from the memory storage. By no means does it mean that your knowledge has altered.

Let us consider another situation. For instance, you have a friend whom you met two years ago. You have formed his

image in your mind. When you think of that particular encounter, his image crosses your mind with precisely the same details. Nothing has affected the image of your friend in your brain. If you were to run into him on any given street now, you would still identify your friend with the same image that you had previously stored in your brain. If any metamorphosis took place within that particular acquired knowledge, you would not be able to recognize him.

However, you should know that no data is lost at the unconscious level of your mind, even if you cannot recall some of your memories. It is important that you realize that the data have been safely stored in your memory. Whatever forms of experiences you have had in your life, they are in your memory. Now, in order to enable you to recall or extract those data, you need some mental training and practice. We will not elucidate this matter at this stage. What we want to say is that it is possible to lose knowledge at the conscious level of understanding and it is possible to feel that knowledge has become faded. For example, the details of the image of that person may be lost, but you still remember him to be that person. This shows knowledge is not material, because all material things change.

It is true that a huge solid mass of a substance cannot be fitted into or occupy a small vessel, a container or a receptacle, and so is the fact about our knowledge which can neither change nor be segmented in small portions. All these facts prove knowledge is not material. Therefore, we as owners of that knowledge cannot be material. It's not possible to suppose we are material, as we are owners of a non-material thing, the knowledge.

There is yet another way of proving this fact. Let us ask

ourselves whether a material thing like a pen has knowledge about itself or about the external world around it. You will definitely say no. We know, for instance that the outer surface of a pen is not at all aware of its inner surface, or vice versa. The same condition applies when we talk obout the relation between two or more pens. Therefore, it is irrelevant to say that these are the parts of the same pen; or for that matter, these parts are of one book; the book is not one single thing. It is made up of many things, many atoms which are gathered in something which is apparently one but not really one. Even if it were one it would have no knowledge about itself.

In the excerpt of late Imam Khomeini's historical letter to Gorbachev (31/12/1988), the Imam raised a philosophical point on material and non-material worlds. The late Imam drew Gorbachev's attention to the logical comparison of the soul, a non-material entity, and a statue, a material entity. Imam Khomeini was of the opinion that not everything could be analyzed and justified through matter. Therefore, Imam Khomeini asked Gorbachev to consider for instance a statue which possesses no knowledge. Every side of the statue is hidden from the other side.(1)

This should be discussed philosophically, but it can be understood without this. So, a material thing has no knowledge about the entirety of its being and it also has no knowledge about the external world. But this is not the case with human beings. A human being has knowledge about himself, even when thinking about a problem in philosophy, mathematics, history, etc. When you have awareness about yourself, then, you also have awareness about the external

(1) *Avaye Tawhid,* p. 11.

world.

There are also experimental reasons to show the existence of the spirit. I am sure you have heard quite a bit about hypnotism. It is related to the invocation of one's soul to do something. Hypnotists make a person go to sleep, and then he gets that person to do something. The hypnotist is able to ask the person under hypnosis to execute his orders. For example, he can ask him to go back ten years and explain what happened when he was at school. He can even get the medium to speak a language he does not know; or sometimes hypnotism is exploited as an instrument to find out what is happening in other places. For instance, a person under the influence of hypnotism is sent to his place of residence and asked to describe what his or her mother is doing. The medium gives a detailed description and then the mother is asked to describe what she has been doing at that particular time, and her description fits with that of the medium. Hypnotism is also used to cure some mental disorders. It can also be used as a means of entertainment.

This is not to say that every person who claims to have such an art is capable of doing so. Their claims may not be genuine. They may pose as imposters who would like to swindle some money out of some simpletons.(1) However, hypnotism as a science and practice cannot be rejected because of the fact that it has some applications in the field

(1) We should be careful about some people who claim such capabilities. They are after making money through some improper means. In Western countries, there are many people who claim to possess some extraordinary powers which enable them to summon spirits through hypnotism or other means. They are just playing tricks on the people. Many of them have been proved to be charlatans and their intentions venal.

of medicine to cure some forms of mental derangement.

There is something else called spiritualism not in the sense of philosophy but a branch of science in parapsychology. People claiming some powers of spiritualism say that they can summon the spirits of the dead through a medium. For example, the spirit of a person's grandfather who died two or three decades ago can be summoned through a medium to speak to him. The spirit can be asked to give the exact location of something like the lost picture of the grandmother. He can even be asked to give the details of his murderer in some mystery murders. It has been proved that some of these stories disclosed by the medium have been found to be authentic.

It is said that today more than a hundred magazines are published around the world on the subject of spiritualism by the spiritualist societies. All of them believe in the existence of the spirit and they claim that they can have contact with the spirits. I do not want to say that all of them are true, but this fact cannot be ignored. It is better to give examples from the lives of our own scholars.

Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, the author of *Al-Mizan,* a great commentary on the Glorious Qur'an (20 volumes), had a brother, who was called Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Ilahi, and this brother was also one of the great scholars. Ilahi had a student who was able to summon spirits. Ilahi, the brother of Allamah Tabataba'i, said that at times he had some questions and problems in the comprehension of some ideas in philosophy and he needed to discuss those problems with the original source. His student used to come to his rescue by recalling the spirits of great philosophers and through him, Ilahi used to

clarify and solve the riddles in philosophy. But his student was not aware of those solutions since he was not a master of philosophy.(1)

It is interesting to observe that a real *'arif* (gnostic) can easily control supernatural phenomena and can even attain a rank where he can control everything in the universe. However, he considers these things of no importance. These practices are within the reach of students of *'irfan* (mysticism). The gnostic masters consider these attainments as very elementary and rudimentary. Those who possess high mystical ranks can easily read your mind. They can predict the events taking shape in totally different surroundings precisely. Therefore, it is not strange that the student of Ilahi was able to summon the spirits.

Siyyed Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani(2) gave a special interview, published in *Kayhan Farhangi*(3), about Hakim Sabzevari.(4) In the interview, Allamah Ashtiyani said that once he had contact with the spirit of Hakim Sabzevari who recited a couplet of Mawlawi from the *Mathnawi* which could not be found in the copies at Allamah Ashtiyani's disposal. Finally, through studies, Allamah Ashtiyani learned that a man from

(1) *Ma'ad Shenasi*, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tehrani, Vol. 2, pp. 182-4.

(2) He is a prominent scholar in *'irfan* and philosophy, who lives in Mashhad. He has authored many books in *'irfan* and philosophy. Many Western scholars pay special visits to him when they come to Iran.

(3) *Kayhan Farhangi*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 1993, serial No. 96, p. 11.

(4) He is a great Islamic Philosopher who wrote Comments on *Ghurar al-Fara'id*, an outstanding work in philosophy. This great scholar's resting place is in Sabzevar, Khurasan Province. Hakim Sabzevari has written a commentary on the famed *Mathnawi* of the great mystic Jalal al-Din Rumi, better known as Maulawi.

the West had found a copy of the *Mathnawi*, which contained the couplet.

So this phenomenon of being able to make contact with the spirit of the dead is a very common practice. It bears no special weight and is insignificant to our scholars and our ulama. They do not, at the same time, want to speak about these matters because they think that if they did so, it would cause some unnecessary complications. They do not want to resort to such practices to avoid publicity as well as people's harassment. Only the closest friends may become aware of these abilities. This issue may be raised in public for very specific purposes on very rare occasions.

The late Imam Khomeini was skilled in *'irfan* in theory and practice. However, he never gave himself the airs of possessing such an insight. Only some of his students who were in his service related some things about him. They even confessed that they had difficulty in perceiving those aspects of his mystical practices. The Late Imam was an *'arif* of a very special rank. He possessed such high traits that he never bragged about himself nor did he attribute any special quality to himself. The great Imam Khomeini was an *'arif* in the real sense. The Imam has left a treasure of works in the field of *'irfan*.

'Irfan is divided into two major branches. There is practical *'irfan* and theoretical *'irfan*. Theoretical *'irfan* is treated as a science whose subject matter is Allah. Practical *'irfan* studies how to get close to Allah and explains the stages of the mystical journey. Those skilled in these branches have studied many things in *'irfan*. They can teach it, but there exists a possibility that they may not be practicing *'arifs*. It may be due to the fact that they have not

reached certain station on the mystical journey. Perhaps they are ordinary beings merely in possesssion of some knowledge which they can transmit on mysticism.

Having both the practical and theoretical knowledge simultaneously, if put into practice, leads us towards understanding Almighty Allah's Infinite Wisdom and His Endless Attributes to be able to be honored with His everlasting blessings to His most amiable lover, His most obedient servant and His complacent slave if our soul totally submits to His Will, and His Injunction.

We have discussed earlier the subject of spirits. We proved the existence of the spirit as a non-material reality. We also said that it is our spirit or soul which makes our personalities, and the body is not as important as the soul. The body is just a receptacle or carcass that carries our spirit. Sometimes the scholars and philosophers compare the body and the spirit to a mount: a mule or a horse. Our soul intimately coordinates with our body and effectively uses it as a means in the performance of different tasks.

It is possible for the soul to reach a position and a stage where it becomes totally independent of the body. This stage can be materialzed as a reality once a person begins to strengthen his soul through worshipping Allah, his obedience to Him, and the performance of religious duties. If one persists in these practices, his dependence on the material world will decrease as his soul progresses towards the Divine kingdom through his spirit's sanctification. Thus, his soul gradually alienates itself from the physical body.

Many of the mystics and great scholars were able to experience ethereal travel. They would sometimes look at their own bodies. For example, some reported that when

they saw their bodies for the first time they thought that they were looking at another person, but after a while they understood that they were looking at their own corporeal bodies.

A very famous and respected scholar from Mashhad, Mirza Jawad Aqa Tehrani (*c.* 1919-1989) says in one of his books:

> *"The best reason (to prove the existence of the spirit) is to see the spirit out of the body. This is for those who had this opportunity and I once have personally seen my spirit, i.e., myself before my body just as I now see myself before my clothes which I have taken off and are before my eyes."*(1)

This scholar was very religious and committed, and his son relates that his father was once sitting in the yard and after a while he stood up and went to his room. After a while he came back. His son asked him why he returned. He said that he had seen some ants on his clothes and realized that they were from the yard and he was afraid that had he returned to the room, those ants would have lost their way. Consequently he came back to the yard to put them back in the same place. Then he returned to his room. It can be concluded that these pious people took care of every detail of their minute actions to attain the lofty positions and special spiritual ranks.

We can deduce that it is not at all difficult to prove the existence of the spirit as we did in our previous discussion. We can now draw this conclusion that since our spirits are

(1) *Bahthi dar Falsafe-ye Bashari va Islami,* p. 33.

non-material, and since our personalities and our real entities are principally shaped by our non-material spirit, our comprehension of the knowledge of the self clearly demonstrates that we should emphasize our spiritual needs more than our material needs. Evidently, we should focus more on the spiritual side of the self than on our corporeal body.

The Status of Human Beings in the Glorious Qur'an

We can look at human beings from two different angles. The first view would be to explore human beings as a whole in general terms; the second view is to look at them as individuals.(1) The Glorious Qur'an presents both aspects. Sometimes the Glorious Qur'an speaks of human beings in general terms. At times, it treats the matter on an individual basis, for example with the presentation of the Pharaoh as a bad person. It also sometimes speaks of good people like the wife of Pharaoh, the prophets and so on. So, both aspects are thoroughly dealt with in the Glorious Qur'an.

Now we want to speak about humans generally, not some individuals, but as a whole. Can we understand from the Glorious Qur'an that humans as a whole are good or bad?

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(1) Sometimes we speak about houses generally. What are the qualities of a house? What are the benefits of a house? Is having a house good or not? But sometimes we speak of a particular house. These are two ways of looking at the same thing. Sometimes we speak about flowers generally or sometimes we say that I like this rose.

What is the answer? As a whole can we say something?

According to the Glorious Qur'an a human being can be the best and the most perfect creature. As far as our knowledge permits, we recognize, comprehend and identify these beings according to given norms. If we compare man to any form of matter or living things such as plants and animals and so on, we will immediately draw an important conclusion that human beings are better, more intelligent and perfect. If man can cultivate a field and make use of the produce for his own and others' benefit, capture animals, make use of them and extract natural resources for upgrading his life and that of the society, naturally, we definitely come to this result that man is a higher being. For instance, an elephant is much bigger than a human, but man trains it and controls it to do some work for him.

Thanks to his talents, physical abilities, mental powers, and the indomitable spirit that Almighty Allah has bestowed upon man, his life has adjusted according to the needs of his time and place. For example, the way of life today is completely different from that of the ancient ages. Again, when we compare the ancient way of life with that of life in the stone age, you will see that man has always been after improvement. The change of the mode of life can be studied in context with that particular age of man. However, this is not the case with the animals. All the animals have followed the same pattern of survival for centuries. The environment may have modelled their pattern of survival but they have never been the masters of the environment. Many animal species have become extinct due to environmental changes. Human beings have shown their capability to survive by modifying their environment to fit their needs.

Consequently, we can say that man is more perfect than animals. Would it be wrong to conclude that man is the best creature?

We can say yes, and we can argue for it in some ways, but we should be careful! When we give an affirmation of our status, it does not mean that every human being is better than every other creature!

Are human beings better than the angels? We do not want to speak about one person. Yes, the Prophet of Islam (S) and Imam Ali (A.S.) are better than any angels. That is clear. But can we make a generalization that a newborn child is better than an angel? It is difficult to say because the actual perfection that a child has is not sufficient to answer this question, but we can argue for the idea in other ways.

According to a verse from the Glorious Qur'an we can deduce that man is very important and precious.

﴿ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا ٱلنُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا ٱلْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا ٱلْمُضْغَةَ عِظَٰماً فَكَسَوْنَا ٱلْعِظَٰمَ لَحماً ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقاً آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ ٱللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ ٱلْخَالِقِينَ﴾

"Then we made the life-germ a clot, then we made the clot a lump of flesh, then we made (in) the lump of flesh bones, then we clothed the bones with flesh, then we caused it to grow into another creation, so blessed be Allah, the best of the creators." (23:14)

This verse explains different stages of creation that a human being goes through. After the body achieves its perfection, Allah, the Most Glorious, gives him another creation. What it means here is that Allah, the Creator,

bestows souls into the body. This is the final phase of creation. On the first day the embryo has no spirit, then after some months, Allah the Glorious breathes life into the fetus. So we can realize why Allah the Almighty has emphasized the stage of creation of the spirit by saying 'another creation' which means that the spirit is not an ordinary thing of the material world. The spirit belongs to another heavenly universe.

When people were asking the Prophet (S) about the spirit and its nature, the following verse was revealed. The answer was that the spirit is from the command of Allah[1] or that it belongs to the abstract world (according to different interpretation, but the result does not change).

﴿وَيَسْئَلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلرُّوحِ قُلِ ٱلرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا﴾

"And they ask you about the spirit. Say: The spirit is from the command of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little." (17:85)

Notice that in the last part of the verse (23:14) Allah, the Almighty, says: "Blessed be Allah, the best of the creators". According to this verse of Scripture, we can now conclude that man is the best creature. Because it is the best Creator

(1) Although everything is created through Divine command, in the material universe Divine command will not be issued before the existence of necessary conditions, such as the existence of an apple after the existence of water, light, heat and so on (or after the existence of supernatural conditions). In the abstract universe there are no conditions and there are only Divine commands. This topic is treated in Islamic philosophy.

who can create the best creature.

To understand this point more perfectly , we should take note of the following verse:

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِيٓ ءَادَمَ وَحَمَلْنَٰهُمْ فِى ٱلْبَرِّ وَٱلْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَٰهُم مِّنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ وَفَضَّلْنَٰهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا﴾

"And surely we have honored the children of Adam, and carried them on the land and at the sea, and provided them with good things, and we have made them to excel by an appropriate excellence over many of those we created." (17:70)

Since Almighty Allah has honored man with the highest position on the earth and has bestowed upon him the highest respect, the Creator provided man with the means to excel many but not all of His other creatures. What this sentence really implies is that there may be some creatures superior to man, otherwise Allah would have pronounced thus: We have made them to excell over all of our creatures. Now the question arises whether man can be considered the best creature.

Man can rise to the rank of supremacy if he makes use of his God-given possibilities. Man progresses on the ladders to supremacy according to his possibilities. These God-given possibilities are the natural or Divine gifts (talents) innate in every being. These talents are of two kinds: actualities and capacities (potentialities) for further perfection. Our corporeal body, being the first dimension, is, to some extent actualized at the time of our birth. But it is not the case with our soul which is the other dimension.

Every individual is capable of reaching the highest level of perfection; they can be vicegerents of Allah; they can be the real servants of Allah. These capacities or potentialities, (although dormant at the time of birth) excel in quality compared to every other creature. Natural gifts do not make us better than other creatures at birth.

However, when we opt for the right path to develop our God-given talents and begin to fully make use of the potentialities bestowed upon us, we start climbing the ladders to supremacy. The more constructively we make use of those potentialities, the better we become compared to other creatures. We can ascend to the ranks that no angel has reached. And if man takes a wrong path and begins making use of the God-given talents in a wrong direction, man can descend to the murkiest level where no animal has fallen!

We can conclude that at the time of birth, because of our innocence and purity we may excel many creatures, but there are some creatures like angels who are better than us at that particular stage. Yes, human beings are equipped with the best talents and are made in a manner that can reach the highest levels possible for a creature. So Allah's power and wisdom is best manifested in human beings. That is the reason that Allah says: "blessed be Allah, the best of the creators."

Now let's return to the Glorious Qur'an to see the values of human beings. We will give a list of attributes beginning with the good attributes of humans and then the bad attributes. There are many verses and it is not possible to mention them all.

Good Attributes of Human Beings

There are many attributes of human beings and many verses about them. We present the most important ones.

A. The human being is the vicegerent of Allah on this earth.

﴿وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّى جَاعِلٌ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً﴾

"And when your Lord said to the angels: I am going to place on the earth a vicegerent." (2:30)

﴿وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَٰٓئِفَ ٱلْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَٰتٍ لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِى مَا ءَاتَىٰكُمْ﴾

"And He it is who has made you successors in the land and raised some of you above others by (various) grades, that He might try you by what He has given you." (6:165)

B. Humans have the greatest capacity for knowledge.

﴿وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ﴾

"And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; then He said: Tell me the names of those if you are right." (2:31)

"Names" in the preceding verse means "realities". When angels thought that they were superior to Adam, Allah, the Most Glorious, wanted to prove that the angels were wrong. The Almighty taught Adam all the facts, and then asked the angels if they were true in their claim, then they would have to divulge those facts to Him. But they were not able to do so. Thus, we can understand from this verse that man is capable of attaining all knowledge.

C. Human beings are created in such a way that they can know their Creator through innate knowledge.

Man has no need to use external ways for knowing Allah. If we go deep into our spirits we can understand that we are created, that we have a Lord. To illustrate by an example, a person went to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A.S.) and asked him to prove the existence of Allah, the Most Glorious. The Imam (A.S.) asked him whether he ever travelled on a ship. The man answered positively. Then the Imam (A.S.) asked him whether in his travel a situation arose where there existed a danger for the ship to sink and that people began to panic and were afraid that the ship would be wrecked and they would die as result. The man again gave an affirmative answer. The Imam (A.S.) then asked: "Did you think of any power that could have saved you then"? When the man said,

"Yes," Imam concluded, "That is Allah, the Omnipotent".(1)

When we are in danger and we feel no one can help us, inborn knowledge is awakened and activated. In many people and in ordinary situations, this knowledge of Allah the Most Glorious is dormant. However it can be awakened and strengthened, especially when we lose our shelter and strength and feel helpless. It is noteworthy that not only our knowledge of Allah is innate (*fitri*) but also the religion of Islam as a whole is in accordance with our spirit. And this is one of the key factors in its survival under very trying conditions and its extraordinary development. The following verse shows this fact.

﴿فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفاً فِطْرَةَ اللهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لاَتَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللهِ ذٰلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لاَيَعْلَمُونَ﴾

"Then set your face upright for the religion in the right state - the nature made by Allah in which He has made men; there is no altering of Allah's creation; that is the right religion, but most people do not know." (30:30)

Almighty Allah has created man in a manner that he becomes aware of the right religion and has strong affinity towards it. These are two dimensions of *fitrat* (the manner of our creation). We will not discuss *fitrat* in detail, but here it is necessary to say that this quality is the nature in man instilled by Allah.

The term *fitri* means a God-given quality in all human

(1) *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 3, p. 41.

beings. Innate matters are of two kinds: knowledge and desire. So, man's *fitri* (natural) instinct consists partly of knowledge and partly of desire (natural drives). Therefore, we can say that every person through his innate God-given knowledge and desire is instinctively aware of the pure religion and has an affinity towards it.

However, when a person is immersed in material life and ordinary affairs and does not pay any attention to nonmaterial ideas, his *fitrat* (innate knowledge) and desire will become clouded. We know that proper nourishment is necessary for the growth of the body. If we neglect the right type of diet, it could lead to different kinds of complications that could cause a malfunction in the body. It is the same with *fitrat*. If we just indulge in material life, the other side will be weakened or clouded by material affairs. But in difficulties, when our attention to the material life is temporarily diverted, we turn entirely to Allah and slowly begin to feel the change from inside.

D. Besides the corporeal body, there is a Divine element or spiritual element in the human being.

﴿ثُمَّ سَوّٰىهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلسَّمْعَ وَٱلْأَبْصَارَ وَٱلْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلاً مَا تَشْكُرُونَ﴾

"Then He made him complete and breathed into him of His spirit and made for you the ears and eyes and the hearts; little is it that you give thanks." (32:9)

What does the Divine spirit mean? Does it mean that Allah has a spirit and has part of it in humans? Definitely

not. When we attribute spirit to Allah, it is something symbolic, just like the House of Allah. Although every thing is created by Allah, some things are more precious and respected than others, so we attribute them to Allah.

Thus, we can conclude that all men have a Divine element in them, which is very important and which makes man a worthy being. The angels were commanded to prostrate before Adam (A.S.) only after Allah had breathed life into him–that is instilling the Divine Spirit into Adam. This spirit is the origin and the source of all special and exclusive perfections of human beings. All the capabilities of this species originate from this endless and everlasting source–the Divine Spirit. Therefore, all of us are indebted to the Almighty, the Creator, for this irrecompensable Blessing.

F. Man was not created haphazardly through chance.

1. God has created human beings.
2. God has created human beings with a purpose.
3. God has chosen human beings as his vicegerents.

These three facts prove that humans are chosen to be Allah's representative on this earth above all other creatures. We shall study how these three prominent factors are presented in the Glorious Qur'an.

As we stated in the previous chapter, man has been chosen by Almighty Allah, the Creator, as his vicegerent. The following is yet another verse confirming the basis of our discussion.

﴿ثُمَّ ٱجْتَبَٰهُ رَبُّهُۥ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ وَهَدَىٰ﴾

"Then his Lord chose him, so He turned to him and guided (him)." (20:122)

Some human beings are chosen by God. The phrase "turned to him" is "*tawbah*" in Arabic, which literally means to return. Sometimes it is attributed to God and sometimes to humans. When someone commits an error, God turns to him to help him. The Lord thus prepares the way for him to repent. And when he repents, and seeks forgiveness, God returns to him which means that God accepts his repentance. It is very clear that if God does not help us to return we cannot repent. God first helps us. He turns to man, then man repents and then God accepts his repentance. Notice the following verse.

﴿ثُمَّ تَابَ عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَتُوبُوا إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ﴾

"then He turned to them (mercifully) that they might turn (to Him); surely Allah is the Oft-returning (to mercy), the Merciful." (9:118)

F. Man is completely free to chose his destiny. That is, man is the master of his own fate.

This is how the Scripture presents the idea of one's destiny. There is the light of guidance. However, one is free to take it or leave it.

﴿إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ ٱلسَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِراً وَإِمَّا كَفُوراً﴾

"Surely we have shown him the way; he may be grateful or ungrateful." (76:3)

To be thankful does not mean to just say: "*shukran lillah*" (Thanks be to Allah). We should thank God for having

guided us towards the righteous path and given us innumerable blessings without expecting anything from us. So, let us open our real eyes and see for ourselves His endless blessings. Being thankful to Him is not based on just mere utterances. We should try to use His blessings in such a way that we get closer to Him to further be blessed by the light of His Benevolence and Guidance.

Both men and jinns have been bestowed the freedom to choose their ways and style of life. As we know, no other creatures have such a choice except the jinns. The jinns have the freedom to believe or disbelieve. But the level of perfection jinns can reach is lower than that of men. Based on such principles jinns must follow the prophets who have been sent to the human masses.

Jinns like human beings have all the biological functions. They reproduce like all living beings. However, their physical structure differs from that of man. Their bodies are light. They are not three dimensional. Jinns can easily move about. They are able to move from one part of the universe to the other easily. Jinns can take the forms of animals, humans, etc., but their creation lacks that ultimate potentiality of perfection with which mankind has been endowed.

Therefore, it is only humans who bear the Divine trust and fulfill the goal of creation.

﴿إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا ٱلْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱلْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا ٱلْإِنسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا﴾

"We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to

carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely he is very unjust, very ignorant." (33:72)

G. Man is respected and has honor.

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِيٓ ءَادَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي ٱلْبَرِّ وَٱلْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا﴾

"And surely We have honored the children of Adam, and We have carried them in the land and the sea, and we have given them to excel by an appropiate excellence over most of those whom we have created." (17:70)

H. Human beings have a God-given power of judgement and conscience.

Everyone understands what is good and what is bad. Prophets, thus, were sent to make people aware and strengthen their powers of understanding. For example, everyone is aware that to lie is wrong. Thus, the prophets came to emphasize the difference between right and wrong. They also teach us things which we were not aware of, such as details. This God-given power can be understood from the following verse.

﴿وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّىٰهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَىٰهَا﴾

"And the soul and Him who perfected it. Then He inspired it to understand what is right and wrong for it." (91:7,8)

Man's success depends on the soul. His discrimination of good from bad is not enough. He should act on the knowledge he has been given by Almighty Lord.

I. Man will never be satisfied by anything except by the remembrance of Allah and drawing near to Him.

﴿اَلَّذِينَ اٰمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللّٰهِ اَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللّٰهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ﴾

"Those who believe and whose hearts are set at rest by the remembrance of Allah; now surely by Allah's remembrance are the hearts set at rest." (13:28)

Every human being tries to reach his Lord. A person who wishes to acquire infinite wealth also tries to reach Allah, but his mistake is that he misunderstands his God. So he reaches for something insecure and transient. Every one wishes to reach Allah but man makes mistakes. The only way to fulfill oneself is by making one's soul aware of Allah. We should try to reach Him with full knowledge and be conscious of the goal we are trying to reach.

﴿يَا اَيُّهَا الْاِنْسَانُ اِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ اِلٰى رَبِّكَ كَدْحاً فَمُلٰقِيهِ﴾

"O man! surely you strive (to attain) to your Lord, a hard striving until you meet Him." (84:6)

There are three types of souls. The highest is the confident soul, the most perfect soul that has obeyed Allah, to the extent that nothing can shake it, like Imam Husayn's

(A.S.) soul (as it is expressed in some *hadiths*). In order to attain this level, we must be in remembrance of Allah in each second of our worldly life. Every expression of our life. our ideas, thoughts, deeds, looks, actions, everything that one can imagine should express Him rather than us.

﴿يَا أَيَّتُهَا ٱلنَّفْسُ ٱلْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ٱرْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً﴾

"O soul that is at rest. Return to your Lord, well pleased (with Him), well pleasing (Him)." (89:27 & 28)

Having a confident heart depends on the remembrance of Allah (ذكـر اللّـه), the Glorification of his Attributes of Beauty and Grandeur. This is the secret key to our ascendance and the attainment of station or rank. One should try to ponder the attributes of His Beauty and Grandeur. Man will never be satisfied by anything except by the remembrance of Allah. These are great topics in Islamic thought.

Many problems in society can be resolved through money or material gain. But the innate problems of humanity cannot be solved by such things. Confidence is not gained by financial matters. Surely, this is not the case. We should ask ourselves this question: why do some of the richest people commit suicide? The fact is that these people initially thought that once they attained a status of wealth, they would have satisfied the ego. They would have a peaceful life. No sooner had they attained riches, than they began to realize that money alone cannot solve the problem. There was something missing in them.

J. The Divine blessings on earth are created for

human beings who are free to utilize the land, harvest the seas, conquer space, utilize animals, etc. to their own benefits and ends.

﴿وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَاتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعاً مِنْهُ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾

"And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, all, from Himself; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect." (45:13)

﴿هُوَ ٱلَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعاً﴾

"It is He who created for you all that is in the earth." (2:29)

K. Man is created to worship Allah the Glorious.

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ ٱلْجِنَّ وَٱلْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾

"And I have not created the jinn and the men except to serve Me." (51:56)

This verse shows that one of the goals of our creation is to serve Allah the Exalted. We are not created merely to eat, drink, and sleep. The ultimate perfection of the human beings cannot be achieved except through the worship of Almighty Allah.

L. Man cannot know himself unless he knows Allah. Man cannot forget Allah, otherwise he will forget himself.

(a) Why was man created?
(b) What is his fate?
(c) What should he do now?

These are some of the questions that can be understood if mankind knows its Creator.

﴿وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنسَاهُمْ أَنفُسَهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ﴾

"And be not like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget their own souls: These it is that are the transgressors." (59:19)

M. Man will understand many realities after his death.

Men are mostly unaware of many things in this universe. They have limited knowledge and are only concerned with their day to day activities–their daily routine. They care little of things beyond the material world. When death overtakes them, the curtains are parted. It is at that juncture that their eyes are opened to see the realities in their nakedness–everything uncovered. It is at this stage that they begin to perceive the Grandeur of the Creator, their misconceptions, their rejections, their negligence, their deeds whether good or bad. Before their eyes, they will see the angels, the burning inferno of hell for the bad deeds, and the everlasting bliss of Paradise for the good deeds.

Death awakens them to realize, possibly too late, that the Islamic ideas were the consummation of the heavenly religions dispensing truth in the fullest possible sense–the Words of Almighty Allah. They are then filled with fright and uncertainty of what they had neglected. They are filled

with remorse of the lost opportunity, which is impossible to compensate–it is water under the bridge.

If one tries to lessen one's dependence on material life, he can reap the benefits in this very world. If money or fame is not important to one, but only remembrance of Allah and things concerning Allah, then one can see those realities which are hidden from others in this world.

﴿لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِنْ هٰذَا فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ﴾

"Certainly you were heedless of it, but now We have removed from your veil, so your sight today is sharp." (50:22)

The Almighty Lord sent apostles, messengers, prophets and Imams to make us aware of both the spiritual and material aspects of life. Allah has never wanted us to be unconscious of the facts. Allah, the Creator wants us to be aware of the path we choose for this worldly and other worldly life.

The Lord wants us to enter another world with the bliss of soul and peace of mind. Almighty Allah sent His Last Messenger, the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad (S) to invite us to Islam, as the consummation of all the heavenly religions. So, it is in the interest and benefit of the human masses to follow and abide by Islamic law through which their eyes will be opened to the naked facts.

However, it is unfortunate to see that people, in general, are in deep slumber in this material world. As soon as they pass to the next stage, the other world, they immediately

become conscious of what is really going on.(1)

A verse in the Glorious Qur'an speaks of the unrighteous people. When they die they ask Allah:

﴿حَتّٰى إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ٱرْجِعُونِ لَعَلِّى أَعْمَلُ صَالِحاً فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ كَلاَّ إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَائِلُهَا وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلٰى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ﴾

"Until when death overtakes one of them, he says: Send me back, my Lord; Haply I may do good in that which I have left. By no means! It is a (mere) word that he speaks; and before them is a barrier until the day they are raised." (23:99 & 100)

Human beings usually become conscious only at the time of death. That is why we should read the Qur'an very carefully and when we reach these verses, we should stop and reflect on them. After death our sight will become more sharp and we will see and realize many things. But Imam Ali (A.S.) said in this regard:

«لَوْ كُشِفَ ٱلْغِطَاءُ مَا ٱزْدَدْتُ يَقِيناً»

"If the curtains are removed for the people, my certainty will not increase."(2)

He means that he has attained the depth of certainty which cannot be enhanced by any means. He has attained

(1) We see this fact in this Tradition: «اَلنَّاسُ نِيَامٌ حَتّٰى إِذَا مَاتُوا اَنْتَبَهُوا» meaning that: *"The people are sleeping until when they die they become awakened". (Bihar al-Anwar,* Vol. 4, p. 43.)

(2) *Bihar al-Anwar,* Vol. 67, p. 73.

the station of Truth.

Once the Prophet (S) was walking with some of his companions, and they met a young man whose strange behavior attracted their attention.

The Prophet (S) asked him: "How are you?"

The young man replid: "I am certain."

The Prophet (S) said: "There is a sign for everything. If you have attained the rank of certainty, what is the sign for your certainty?"

The man replied: "My certainty tells me to fast in hot days and to pray all night. This is my sign. I have reached a stage that worshipping Allah alone is the only pleasure that I really derive. I see heaven and hell. And of those around you, I can see who are the people of heaven and of hell."

The Prophet (S) stopped him and said: "Say no more." Because it is not good to tell others of their future.

The young man begged the Prophet (S) to pray to Allah to grant him the status of martyrdom. The Prophet (S) prayed, and later the man was martyred on a battlefield.(1)

That young man's good deed and his detachment from the material world earned him the status of having attained certainty. His soul was free and he could see what a person who has his heart set on the worldly glitters cannot see. The Glorious Qur'an states that if we attained the status of certainty we could even see heaven and hell.

﴿كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ ٱلْيَقِينِ لَتَرَوُنَّ ٱلْجَحِيمَ﴾

"Nay! If you had Known with a certain knowledge, You should most certainly have

(1) *Bihar al-Anwar,* Vol. 22, p. 146, No. 139.

seen the hell." (102:5 & 6)

Heaven and hell have been created for us, and they are not something that will be created in the future. A person who has pure insight can see them. Once a man named Hammam went to Imam Ali (A.S.) and asked him to tell him the qualities of the pious (*muttaqin*) to the extent that he could see them. First Imam Ali (A.S.) did not want to say anything but Hammam insisted. One of the points mentioned by the Imam was that these people are like the people who have seen heaven and hell.(1)

N. Men do not desire only material matters.

People have some important things to consider as ideals. They can try their best only to attain the blessings and pleasures of Almighty Allah. The following verse explains that His pleasure is the most important reward.

﴿وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِى جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ﴾

"Allah has promised the believing man and believing woman gardens, beneath which rivers flow to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual abode; and best of all is Allah's goodly pleasure that is the grand achievement." (9:72)

This is the greatest achievement and not the material things. Here God explains the benefits and blessings in

(1) *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Sermon 191. For further information see pp. 140 & 141 of this volume.

Paradise, and says that to be aware that God is satisfied with you, and that He is pleased with you, is the greatest blessing. This knowledge for man is extremely important. The desire of every person is to obtain the pleasure of Allah, the Glorious.

The Vices Attributed to Human Beings

We can describe man in two different ways. We can view man in general terms as masses or speak about some individuals. When we say an individual is good or bad, it does not imply that all are bad or good. It does not mean that the same qualities can be attributed to all human beings. If an individual happens to possess an undesirable quality, that stain can be cleansed through strengthening his faith. Here we want to mention some undesirable attributes of human beings mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an:

A, B. Man is unjust and ignorant.

These two qualities are expressed in the following verse:

﴿إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُوماً جَهُولاً﴾

"Surely he is very unjust, very ignorant." (33:72)

Two qualities, man being very unjust and his being very ignorant are expressly emphasized. In Arabic there is a

difference between *zalim* and *zalum*. A *zalim* is a person who commits sin, even if only once, but according to Arabic grammar *zalum* (ظلوم) is said to be the *exaggeration form* (صيغة المبالغة) of *zalim* (ظالم). It means a person who frequently commits unjust actions. Also, *jahul* is the exaggeration form of *jahil*. It means a person who is very ignorant or completely unwise.

Human beings suffer from ignorance and injustice. The unjust act is not restricted to others. It can be applied to the person himself.

﴿وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ ٱللَّهِ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ﴾

"Every person who breaks Divine laws, has oppressed himself." (95:61)

If a person does not pray or fast, then he has been unjust to himself. When a person beats someone or robs him of his money, he is initially doing a disservice to himself, then to the other person. Committing a sin is just like drinking poisoned water. Now if this person drinks poison, he is hurting himself. The same logic can be applied when he harms another being. The consequences of his ill acts would be his destroying the bases of his inherent God-given purity. He initiates hindrances on the way to his perfection.

C. Man is ungrateful.

This fact is expressed in the following verse:

﴿وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى أَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ إِنَّ ٱلْإِنسَانَ لَكَفُورٌ﴾

"And it is He who has brought you to life, then He will cause you to die, then bring you to life (again); most surely man is very ungrateful."

(22:66)

In Arabic, *kufr* basically means to cover. For example, if a farmer places seeds in the ground, this action is called *kufr*. The term has been used later for two other meanings which were likened to the root meaning (to cover). These two are:

1. To disbelieve in Allah or his religion.

2. To be unthankful relating to the blessings of Allah (the Almighty). When a person is given health but misuses it or thinks it is not from Allah, this person is a *kafir* and if he is very ungrateful he is *kafur*. This meaning is meant by the above verse.

Man is often unthankful and ungrateful. He quickly becomes oblivious to the blessings of Allah, the Beneficent.

We read in the Glorious Qur'an the story of Korah (*Qarun*). He had so much money kept in the treasury safes that it took a large number of the keepers of the treasures who had diffculty carrying the keys of his treasury.

﴿اٰتَيْنٰهُ مِنَ الْكُنُوزِ مَا اِنَّ مَفَاتِحَهُ لَتَنُوْٓءُا بِالْعُصْبَةِ اُولِى الْقُوَّةِ﴾

"We gave him [Korah] from the treasures to the extent that keys were difficult to be carried by a group of people possessed of great strength." (28:76)

Korah was invited to be thankul to Allah for innumerable bounties that the Almighty Lord, the Beneficent, bestowed on him. They invited Korah to make use of the blessings and perform good deeds to attain a station of piety and bliss in the next abode (the Hereafter) as God has bestowed upon him His favor. However, the ignorant and arrogant eyes of Korah could not perceive the divine blessings. In return to

this invitation he said:

﴿إِنَّمَا أُوتِيتُهُ عَلَى عِلْمٍ عِنْدِي﴾

"I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have." (28:78)

Korah was finally punished by Allah. Allah made the earth swallow him up and his abode. Those who yearned for his place only the day before began to say:

﴿وَيْكَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ ٱلرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَوْ لَا أَنْ مَنَّ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا لَخَسَفَ بِنَا وَيْكَأَنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ ٱلْكَافِرُونَ﴾

"Ah! (Know) that Allah amplifies and straitens the means of subsistence for whomsoever he pleases of His servants; had not Allah been gracious to us, He would most surely have abased us; Ah! (know) that the ungrateful are never successful." (28:82)

D. Man is an inordinate being.

This fact is expressed in the following verse:

﴿كَلَّا إِنَّ ٱلْإِنْسَانَ لَيَطْغَىٰ أَنْ رَآهُ ٱسْتَغْنَىٰ﴾

"Nay! Man is most surely inordinate, when he sees himself free from need." (96:6 & 7)

Human beings feel self-sufficient when they enjoy the status of wealth, health or position. When a man has no money or social position or is not from an important family, he is not inordinate. To illustrate, one of the companions of the Prophet (S) was quite poor. He asked the Prophet (S) for help. The Prophet gave him some money. That money

was blessed and had good effects. Day by day his money increased. He used to pray behind the Prophet (S). But as his money increased, his worship decreased. The Prophet (S) began to feel concerned about him. So, one day he asked that man to pay the money back. When he paid it back, his money was no longer blessed. He became poor again and started to attend the mosque regularly and say his prayers behind the Prophet (S).

E. Man is hasty and does not have sufficient patience.

This fact is expressed in the following verse:

﴿وَيَدْعُ ٱلْإِنسَانُ بِالشَّرِّ دُعَاءَهُ بِالْخَيْرِ وَكَانَ ٱلْإِنسَانُ عَجُولاً﴾

"And man prays for evil as he ought to pray for good and man is ever hasty." (17:11)

Therefore if one wants to be patient, he will have to train himself.

F. Man shows total reliance on God only when he is in trouble and difficulty.

When men's difficulties disappear their reliance also diminishes. They think they have become self-sufficient. This fact is expressed in the following verse:

﴿وَإِذَا مَسَّ ٱلْإِنسَانَ ٱلضُّرُّ دَعَانَا لِجَنْبِهِ أَوْ قَاعِداً أَوْ قَائِماً
فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُ ضُرَّهُ مَرَّ كَأَنْ لَمْ يَدْعُنَا إِلَى ضُرٍّ مَسَّهُ﴾

"And when affliction touches a man, he calls on Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing; but when We remove his affliction from him, he passes on as though he had never

called on Us on account of an affliction that touched him." (10:12)

For example, before examinations students observe all the religious rituals and try to be close to Almighty Allah, but once the examinations are over, the feeling of being close to the Lord, the Creator, wanes.

G. Man is a niggardly being.

This fact is expressed in the following verse:

﴿قُلْ لَوْ أَنْتُمْ تَمْلِكُونَ خَزَائِنَ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّي إِذاً لَأَمْسَكْتُمْ خَشْيَةَ الْإِنْفَاقِ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ قَتُوراً﴾

"Say: if you controlled the treasures of the mercy of my Lord, then you would withhold (them) from fear of spending, and man is niggardly." (17:100)

H. Man is a greedy being.

The fact is expressed in the following verse:

﴿إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعاً إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعاً وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعاً إِلَّا الْمُصَلِّينَ الَّذِينَ ...﴾

"Surely man is created of a greedy temperament; being greatly grieved when evil afflicts him, and niggardly when good befalls him, except those who pray, those who..." (70:19)

I. Man is an inquisitive and curious being.

He is interested in discussing and arguing about everything more than needed. The Scripture presents such an idea:

﴿وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي هٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ أَكْثَرَ شَيْءٍ جَدَلًا﴾

"And certainly We have explained in this Qur'an every kind of example; and man is most of all given to contention." (18:54)

Up to now we have discussed nine bad attributes of human beings (although there are more). According to the Glorious Qur'an a human being is a responsible being and has the capability of either following the right path or going astray. A man is able to choose either of these qualities, grow them, nurture them and strengthen them in his being.

The bad attributes or vices are not such that they can prevent a human being from reaching perfection, because the vices are of three kinds:

I) Some are necessary implications of his creation and he can not prevent them. For example, he is weak and has many limitations in his existence and actions. Allah, the Glorious and Most High, says:

﴿وَخُلِقَ الْإِنْسَانُ ضَعِيفًا﴾

"And man is created weak." (4:28)

This kind of attribute will not be questioned or punished. Allah just explains them to make us aware of our weakness and to prevent us from taking pride in ourselves.

II) Some are implications of his creation but are not necessary. It means that his nature only inclines toward vice, but it can be resisted. To explain this point philosophically, we should say that his nature is not the sufficient condition

or complete cause (*al-'illah al-tammah*) of moral vice. It is just the incomplete or partial cause (*al-'illah al-naqisah*). It is up to human beings to submit themselves to their nature or to resist. For example, growing up in a bad family tends to result in vice, but this is only an incomplete cause. Returning to our own discussion, the human being has a greedy temperment but he can control and direct his temperment to any direction he wants. He can even use it to acquire infinite perfection.

III) Some vices are caused by the human being himself, i.e., by his free will and are not due to human or individual nature. For example, if a human being is a liar, this is because he himself has chosen that.

Thus, we understood that the vices of human beings cannot prevent us from perfection and that Allah, the Most Merciful and Forgiving, will never punish us for those nature-given attributes, but if we choose to exercise them we would be punished. Man possesses free will and it is up to him to decide what to do or obtain. In the Glorious Qur'an Allah says:

﴿إِنَّ ٱلْإِنسَانَ لَفِى خُسْرٍ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَ عَمِلُوا ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَ تَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ﴾

"Most surely man is in loss, except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience." (103:2 & 3)

Accoring to the above verses all human beings are in a state of loss, because they are losing their lives and their bodily and mental powers. The only exceptions are those

who believe, do good and invite each other towards truth and patience. These people spend their lives or powers or properties to get divine pleasure and salvation. So what they get or obtain is more than what they spend or lose.

﴿لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَانَ فِىٓ أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَٰهُ أَسْفَلَ سَٰفِلِينَ
إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ﴾

"Certainly We created man in the best make. Then We rendered him the lowest of the low. Except those who believe and do good, so they shall have a reward never to be cut off."(95:4-6)

Again we see the same fact. Allah has created man in the best way. Then it is up to him to be the lowest of the low or to be higher than other creatures, even angels.

It is obvious that not everybody known to be a human being is precious. Human beings are not at the same level. Therefore they should not be treated equally. For example, those people who create world-wars and perform many crimes are not to be respected at all. Really, they are not true human beings (in spite of their shape or body).

God-willing there will be an appendix on Islamic punishments. We will shed some light on this matter to meet objections against the Islamic system of punishment suggested by some Westerners who consider it incompatible with human values.

The Representative of Allah on Earth

We previously mentioned that one of the good attributes and values of human beings is the possibility of being caliph or representative of Allah on His earth (خليفة الله في أرضه). This is the highest value or perfection that one may reach. Because of the importance of this subject we should speak about it more.

The term *khalifah* literally means that which comes after another, a succcessor. For example, a new generation is *khalifah* of the old one.

﴿فَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ أَضَاعُوا الصَّلٰوةَ وَ اتَّبَعُوا الشَّهَوَاتِ فَسَوْفَ يَلْقَوْنَ غَيّاً﴾

"But there came after them an evil generation, who wasted the prayer, and followed lusts; so they shall encounter error" (19:59)

Those people who were rulers after the Prophet (S) were called *'khalifat al-rasul'*, meaning successor of the Prophet, such as Imam Ali (A.S.). So what does *'Khalifat Allah'*

mean?

Every person chosen by Allah to be His representative on earth is called 'خليفة الله'. They are chosen by Allah to lead people, to judge between them and to guide them, because it is not possible for all people to receive Divine laws by themselves or to judge.

One of the verses in the Glorious Qur'an about this position is the following verse.

﴿يَا دَاوُدُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ فَاحْكُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوَىٰ فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَضِلُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ بِمَا نَسُوا يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ﴾

"O Dawud! Surely we have made you a viceroy (khalifah) in the land; so judge between men with justice and do not follow desire, lest it should lead you astray from the path of Allah; (as for) those who go astray from the path of Allah, they shall surely have a severe punishment because they forgot the day of reckoning." (38:26)

This verse was revealed after a certain event. God wanted to test Dawud. The story is expressed in the previous verses, i.e., 21-25. Finally Allah made him His representative on earth and then a judge. According to the monotheistic view of the Glorious Qur'an no one has authority over people and the right to judge among people, unless assigned or approved by Allah.

If someone is knowledgeable, it does not mean he can judge. Allah has the right to judge and He appoints

prophets. Prophets can also appoint others. There are many traditions of our Imams in which they explain that a person who has some qualities such as justice and ability to understand Islamic laws directly (*ijtihad*) can also judge as they are appointed by the Imams. So, there are two types of appoinment: General appoinment which is due to the possession of certain qualities, and special appoinment in which some particular person is appointed and his name is mentioned.

So Dawud was one of the representatives of Allah on earth. Another case is found in the following verse.

﴿وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

"And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place in the earth a khalifah, they said: What! Will You place in it such as shall make mischief in it and shed blood, and we celebrate Your praise and extol Your holiness? He said: surely I know what you do not know." (2:30)

Here, a question arises that when God appointed a *khalifah* (according to the verse 2:30), was that appointing exclusive to Adam (A.S.) or not? The answer is negative. As we saw before Dawud (A.S.) was *khalifah*. Certainly Moses, Jesus, the Noble Prophet (S) and some other prophets were also *khalifah*. Some scholars use the following verse as one of their reasons to prove that it was not exclusive to Adam (A.S.).

﴿وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَٰٓئِفَ ٱلْأَرْضِ وَ رَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَٰتٍ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِى مَا ءَاتَىٰكُمْ﴾

"And He is who has made you successors in the land and raised some of you above others by (various) grades, that He might try you by what He has given you." (6:165)

Now let us go back to the verse 2:30. When we observe what the angels said, we find out that the appointment was not exclusive to Adam, because they said: *"What! Will You place in it such as shall make mischief in it and shed blood...?"* Those angels could not be afraid of Adam (A.S.). And if this position given to human beings were not so important, they would not protest or question Allah and they would not say: *"What! Will You place in it... and we celebrate Your praise and extol Your holiness?"*

So this is the conclusion: Allah wanted to appoint representatives of Himself on earth. The angels understood firstly, that this position is very high, secondly, that it was not exclusive to Adam (A.S.), and thirdly, that Allah wanted to make a new species on earth and among them some would be good and some would be bad and amongst those good human beings would be some at this high position (caliphate) and they would be rulers on earth or the natural universe. As a result, the angels wished that they had that closeness to Allah, because they were aware of their own goodness and they observed only negative points of human beings. Answering them Allah said: *"I know what you do not know"*. When Allah wanted to show the angels the merits of human beings, He taught Adam (A.S.) all the names. Let's follow this part of the problem through the

following verses.

﴿وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ﴾

"And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; Then He said: Tell me the names of those if you are right." (2:31)

﴿قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ﴾

"They said: Glory be to You! We have no knowledge but that which You have taught us; surely You are the Knowing, the Wise." (2:32)

﴿قَالَ يَا آدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ فَلَمَّا أَنْبَأَهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ﴾

"He said: 'O Adam! inform them of their names. Then when he had informed them of their names, He said 'Did I not say to you that I surely know what is hidden (ghayb) in the heavens and the earth and (that) I know what you manifest and what you hide?" (2:33)

So at least one of condition of being *khalifah* of Allah is conclusive knowledge. According to Shi'i Islam all the fourteen infallibles had this knowledge. We say in 'ziyarat':

«اَلسَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ يَا خُلَفَاءَ اللهِ فِي أَرْضِهِ»

"Peace be with you, O representatives of Allah on earth."

When a person is chosen to be *khalifah*, he at least has one of two types of guardianship (*wilayat*):

a) Guardianship over the universe and creatures. Having this kind of guardianship one can do everything in this world such as reviving the dead or curing the sick. It is called 'generative (*takwini*) guardianship'.

b) Guardianship in judgment and making laws. Ordinary people can never make laws. Even a *mujtahid* can not make any law and his job is just to refer to Islamic sources and understand practical laws. Also Islamic parliament can not make some laws instead of Divine laws. They try their best to apply general laws to different situations and if they make some laws, they are really filling empty places in the legislative universe which is delegated to them by Allah (to the people or to the legal authoritiy). This kind of guardianship is called 'legislative (*tashri'i*) guardianship'.

According to the verse (38:26) Dawud (A.S.) had this kind of guardianship. Adam (A.S.) was *khalifah* on earth while perhaps there was no need for laws or judgments (for a further discussion of the very point look at comments on the verse 2:21). So at least his actual guardianship was generative. But after deeper study it will be obvious that every representative of Allah was allowed to apply his guardianship in both aspects: generative and legislative, if necessary and possible.

Free-will

In previous discussions we studied the status of human beings in the Glorious Qur'an. We saw that they are not at the same level. They can be higher than angels and they can be representatives (caliphs) of Allah on earth. They can also go downwards and be lower than animals. It is up to human beings themselves to select their own way of life.

In this part we want to study free will and answer those who believe in determinism. If someone believes in determinism he will lose his hope of a better future and will not try to purify himself. Some criminals or despotic rulers used to justify their crimes and sins by saying that they were pre-determined. So it is necessary to refute determinism as one of the most dangerous obstacles against purification of the soul.

The next step will be to see how we select something and what we should select and what we should observe in our selection or decision.

The question that arises is: "Are human beings free to do what they want or are they determined?" Determinism is a

view which says man is determined so he does not act freely.(1)

There are different types of determinism:

I) Philosophical determinism: Some people misunderstood the principle of causality. There is a necessary relationship between a complete cause and its effect, that is, whenever a complete cause comes into being its effect necessarily comes into being and there is no other possibility. Philosophical determinists have thought that we are not free in our actions because our actions are effects and they are necessarily brought into being. But they have neglected an important fact, i.e., our will or decision as one of the factors which makes the complete cause. When I decide to drink a glass of water and there is a glass of water and nothing prevents me from this, I necessarily drink. But this necessity has not come from outside. It is a result of my decision, my existence and power and the existence of water and so on.

II) Historical determinism: Some people believe that history has a kind of spirit and has selected from the outset one way to its end and every historical age or period is considered as a link in the long chain of history. Every revolution or movement happens because of the will of history and nations are only some means for history to actualize its will. Nobody can change historical conditions or resist historical changes.

There is no reason to believe in a spirit for history, let alone will and consciousness. History is not an independent

(1) This is usually called 'hard determinism' by philosophers.

existent. People themselves make their fate and future. Great figures in different nations were those who had powerful and strong wills and were not satisfied with their actual situation, and finally they changed the views of people and changed their societies. Prophets are good examples. For example, the Noble Prophet of Islam (S) started his message in a society and a historical period which were completely depraved. No one could imagine that a religion would begin there which would reach all the world and would have followers from all different races and classes.

III) Social determinism: Some determinists say that every society has a spirit. Human spirits are merged in the spirit of their society. Everything in the society occurs because of the demands of the society. Individuals can do nothing. They are under the control of social laws, customs and so on. If a person is clever and aware he will never waste his powers to move against his society.

There is no reason to believe in the existence of society as independent from its individuals. There are only individuals. But we can consider them in two ways: separately and together. When we consider individuals together we call it a society. Therefore when there are for example, 100,000 individuals, there are only 100,000 beings and no more, or when there are 30 people in a bus, there are only those 30 people and there is nothing besides those pepole to be called a group. So a society or a group has no spirit or personality (or even independent being). Having understood the non-existence of the society, it is obvious that there is no place to claim that some demands of the society determine the behaviour of its members.

Individuals are makers of societies through their free will,

just as they make history. It is noteworthy that these indivduals are not separated from each other. There is a close relationship between them. There is a strong interaction among them. So if someone wants to adapt his actions and activities to social ideals it will be very easy for him because other members of the society or at least the majority agree with him and they will support him. But if someone wants to change his society, it needs a lot of efforts and constant work. Even if someone wants to conduct his life in his own way, in spite of others, it will be very difficult, for there are many interactions between idividuals in the socicty. To be religious in a religious society is much easier than in a non-religious society, but it is not necessary. Also, to be a real Muslim in some society which is not commited to Divine morals and values is difficult, but not impossible.

According to Islam every person is responsible for his actions. On the Day of Judgement no one can say that he was bad because he lived in a bad family or society. But on the other hand all people are responsible for their societies. No one can say that he had nothing to do with his society. If children are being attracted by enemies or some Muslim youth are imitating Western habits or generally a Western way of life and I can do something about it with my thought or my money or so on, I cannot say: "It is none of my business."

IV) Natural determinism: Some people believe that according to the natural laws not only our body is formed and controlled by nature, but also our thoughts and behaviours are all controlled by nature or natural factors which are not decided or planned by ourselves. These determinists emphasize the effects of climate, environment,

food, medicine and inheritance. It is possible to make a person sad or happy with some food or medicine. If a person's father is an artist, a painter, that person will be an artist as well.

This view is partly true. Natural factors have some effects on our behaviour or actions, but they are not absolute. Finally it is up to a person to decide for himself. Those external factors might make the process of decision-making easier or harder. However, a human being is free. If a person's parents are illiterate, that person will not have to be the same. If the parents are bad, the possibility of him being good is not nil. As we see in history there existed good people amongst bad people and vice versa. Take the example of Noah's son. Although Noah (A.S.), the father, was a prophet of God, his son chose to become a bad and disobedient servant of God. When Noah made the ship and called all the people to board it, his son refused and climbed on the top of a mountain thinking the water would not reach him. Allah says:

﴿وَنَادىٰ نُوحٌ ٱبْنَهُ وَ كَانَ فِى مَعْزِلٍ يَا بُنَىَّ ٱرْكَبْ مَعَنَا وَ لاَتَكُنْ مَعَ ٱلْكَافِرِينَ قَالَ سَآوِى إِلَى جَبَلٍ يَعْصِمُنِى مِنَ ٱلْمَاءِ قَالَ لاَعَاصِمَ ٱلْيَوْمَ مِنْ أَمْرِ ٱللهِ إِلاَّ مَنْ رَحِمَ وَ حَالَ بَيْنَهُمَا ٱلْمَوْجُ فَكَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُغْرَقِينَ﴾

"And Noah called out to his son, and he was aloof: O my son! Embark with us and be not with the unbelievers. He said: I will betake myself for refuge to a mountain that shall protect me from the water. Noah said: There is no protector today from Allah's punishment except for whom He has mercy; and a wave

intervened between them, so he was of the drowned." (11:42 & 43)

Thus, Islam pays attention to the children's upbringing and training before, during and after birth. All these are taken into account, but their influences are not decisive as free will is preserved.

V) Religious determinism: There are some sects in Islam and other religions which believe that Allah decides for us and none of us is free to do what he wants.

This belief is mainly due to lack of knowledge. For instance, they say whether a person prays or not, whether he is truthful or not, whether he is an oppressor or not, is all because of Allah's will and human beings have no say or fault in this matter.

This belief was developed by some theists to preserve monotheism. They thought that if we say people are free in their life, it means that Allah has nothing to do in this part of the world and it is up to human beings to do whatever they want. In their view monotheism demands the denial of any human role in action. They also misunderstood some verses of the Glorious Qur'an.

This view is completely against Divine justice. It is also against Divine wisdom (*hikmah*). According to this view sending prophets and inviting people to the religion and Divine commands are useless. If this view were true, then Allah would not have assigned rewards and punishments for our actions.

The evil intentions and politics of some despotic rulers like the Umayyads and Abbasids is another reason for the appearance of this belief in Islamic culture. They spread this

belief for their own desires and benefits. They said that Allah had given power to them and no one was able to interfere in His deeds. So no one was allowed to protest against them. If the *Ahl al-bayt* (people of the household of the Prophet) were not allowed to rule, it was because Allah wanted this, or if Yazid as a ruler did many bad things nobody had a right to say anything. For example, when Imam Husayn (A. S.) was martyred, 'Ubayd Allah, the son of Marjanah and the commander of Kufa, took members of the *Ahl al-bayt* as prisoners. He said in the great mosque of Kufa: "Praise be to Allah Who has made righteousness successful and has helped the leader of the believers (meaning Yazid) and his followers and killed the liar, the son of the liar." When he took the prisoners to his palace, he addressed Lady Zaynab (A.S.) and said: "Praise be to Allah Who destroyed your respect and killed you and proved that you are liars." Then Lady Zaynab (A.S.) spoke and defeated him. Then he turned his face to Imam Sajjad (A.S.), the fourth Imam, and asked who he was. Some answered: "Ali, the son of Husayn." He said: "Did Allah not kill Ali, the son of Husayn?" Imam said: "I had a brother who was also called Ali, the son of Husayn. People killed him." Then 'Ubayd Allah' said: "No, Allah killed him." When Imam disproved his claim he became very angry and commanded his soldiers to cut Imam's neck off, but Zaynab said: "O son of Zyad! You did not leave any of our men alive. If you want to kill him, You must kill me with him".(1)

These rulers tried to attribute everything to Allah in a wrong way to conceal their role. There were also some weak and ignorant Muslims who wanted to justify their weak and

(1) *Al-Luhuf fi Qatla al-Tufuf*, Ibn Tawus, p. 68.

bad behaviour through determinism and attributing everything to Allah.

Praise be to Allah we have today pure Islam and we can easily solve the problem. We know that monotheism does not demand determinism at all.

Now let us quote some Qur'anic verses on this topic.

﴿قُلِ ٱللَّهُمَّ مَٰلِكَ ٱلْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِى ٱلْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَ تَنْزِعُ ٱلْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ وَ تُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَ تُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِيَدِكَ ٱلْخَيْرُ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ﴾

"Say: O Allah, Master of the kingdom! Thou givest the kingdom to whomsoever Thou pleasest and takest away the kingdom from whomsoever Thou pleasest, and Thou exaltest whom Thou pleasest and abasest whom Thou pleasest; in Thine hand is the good; surely, Thou hast power over all things." (3:26)

This verse has one of the pictures that show monotheism (*tawhid*) very well and it is a must for every Muslim to believe in monotheism in this way (mentioned in the verse). Some people misunderstand or misuse this verse. They say that according to this verse, Allah had given the power of rulership to all despotic rulers.

We should know that Allah has two kinds of will (*iradah*):

I) Generative (*takwini*)**:** This kind of will is necessary in every thing. If there is something or there is not, it is because of Allah's will. Nothing in the universe is independent from Allah, the Creator. For example, if the weather is hot it is because of Allah's will or if I am alive it is because this is what Allah wants. Every single action in this

world is done because of His will. Does this mean Allah is satisfied with all the actions of human beings? No, although Allah's will is in their actions, He has given them free will at the same time to choose the right way. Here comes the second type of Divine will.

II) Legislative (*tashri'i*): This is about goodness and badness, about what to do and what not to do. He commands to do good and refrain from bad. So all good actions are done according to this will and all bad actions are done against this will. In order to make this concept clear, let us take the example of Imam Husayn (A.S.). Was he killed through Allah's will? The answer is "Yes" and "No": Yes according to the generative will and No according to the legislative will.

As far as the generative will is concerned, nothing can be done without Allah's will. But this does not mean that He is pleased with all actions. This is the point of misunderstanding which leads to determinism. Another example: One father gives some money to his son to buy something and advises him to buy good things like books. The son is not determined to buy. Whatever he buys is according to his father's decision, but if he buys cigarettes he buys against his father's advice. No one can say that this son was independent in his action and also no one can say that this son had to buy cigarettes or he was not responsible based on the fact that his father made him able to do that.

Thus, the above verse (3:26) talks about His generative will. It does not mean that Allah is pleased with rulers like Pharaoh or Yazid. Another verse is the following verse which expresses the idea of free will explicitly.

﴿إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَانَ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَّبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعاً بَصِيراً إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ ٱلسَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِراً وَإِمَّا كَفُوراً﴾

"Surely we have created man from a small life-germ uniting (itself): We mean to try him, so We have made him hearing, seeing. Surely We have shown him the way: he may be thankful or unthankful." (76:2 & 3)

So Allah has shown us the way. It is in our hand to be thankful or not. How can we be thankful? By using His blessings in the right manner and not only by saying:

«شُكْراً لِلّٰهِ» (Thanks be to God).

Another verse:

﴿إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ ٱللّٰهُ رَبُّ ٱلْعَالَمِينَ﴾

"It is naught but a reminder for the nations, for him among you who pleases to go straight. And you do not will, unless God wills, the Lord of all Being." (81:27-29)

Thus the Glorious Qur'an is useful for those who want to go straight. They are free. They just have to take the first step and Allah will help them. But their decision is not independent of Allah's generative will (to enable them). They will what Allah wills. In the following verse again the doctrine of free will is expressed.

﴿إِنَّ فِي ذٰلِكَ لَذِكْرىٰ لِمَنْ كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ أَوْ أَلْقَى ٱلسَّمْعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ﴾

"Most surely there is a reminder in this for him who has a heart or he gives ear with a present mind." (50:37)

The process of being a faithful person is not a physical or chemical process, but a spiritual one. It does not need material things. It needs attention and consciousness. For instance, in one class a person is giving advice to some students. We see sometimes one person understands everything and the one next to him does not.

What is the reason? The external things are the same: teacher, black board, class etc.. The reason is that the first student gives his full attention to the teacher and takes the matter seriously while the second one is the opposite. This point is very important.

As we have already mentioned, human beings are created in a manner that they are mainly sensitive to changes. For example, if he wears a new watch, at first he feels uneasy about it because there are some changes in him or if he wears clothes at first he feels the heaviness of the clothes. Gradually he will get used to them.

This is Allah's wisdom. Everything should be taken seriously from the outset; otherwise it could be dangerous. For example, when a person steals something if his parents are not severe with him he will not take the matter seriously so he will not feel guilty and will continue committing it to the extent that he might even kill people easily.

We should train ourselves to be attentive to every matter, every fact. Something my friend says might change my whole life. If we help someone it might bring Allah's mercy or one bad action can affect our whole life.

Until now, we have observed the idea of free will in the Glorious Qur'an directly. There are also many many verses indicating the idea of free will indirectly. Those verses cannot be interpreted otherwise. For example, all the verses on reward and punishment and Divine judgment imply free will and responsibility of human beings in their deeds. All the verses about sending prophets and their messages and efforts to invite and guide people imply free will. All the verses about Divine laws (*wajib* and *haram*) imply free will, etc..

The Importance of Knowledge in Decision-making

In our previous discussions we came to the conclusion that human beings are not the same; some are good and highly respected because of their own decisions and deeds and some are bad and worse than animals, again because of their own decisions and deeds. The last topic, "Free-will," was selected in order to reject all the excuses expressed by unsuccessful people who want to shift the responsibility completely to others or to the society or the environment or the like.

In the present discussion we want to understand those factors which bear on our decision-making or will. We may divide them into three categories:

a) knowledge;

b) desires and inclinations;

c) power and ability.

If something is unknown to me and I do not have any information at all about it, I can never decide to do it. Let's

consider a simple example. Suppose you want to buy a certain book. What types of knowledge do you need?

I) You should know your need. What kind of book do you need?

II) You should know your desire and favourite style of writing.

III) You should know and consider your background in that aspect or realm. How much do you know about that subject ? To what extent can you proceed with the subject? If you are a student of high school, you may not make use of books which are written for experts on math or physics.

IV) You should know where to find and buy books.

V) You should know the content, the style, the writer and the price of the book which you want to select and buy.

The second factor is related to desires and inclinations. If you have complete knowledge but you do not have any desire to read or have books, you will not decide to buy. Thus, the importance of the second factor is clear. Also the importance of power is clear. If you feel that you cannot do something you will not decide to do it. All actions require some kinds of power. Now let us turn to our own case.

On the way to perfection human beings are equipped with desire. All have some degree of self-love, so they desire and make efforts for their well-being, for a better future. Yet, they often make mistakes in deciding what is really better for them. Human beings also have power to follow the path to perfection. Yet, they are different in the amount of power they have spiritually, mentally and physically. For example, some can understand facts or decide what to do much better than others. Some can resist sin much easier

than other people. Some are very respected and honourable and are not easily attracted to temporary material interests. Some are very healthy in their bodies so they engage in more voluntary fasting to obtaining greater spiritual rewards.

All these differences are natural. Indeed, they are necessary demands of this material universe. But we should know that according to Islam, rewards or punishments and their amount are and will be decided in consideration of man's power and abilities. If someone has really no power to understand or to act according to Islamic rules, he is excused and Allah is most generous towards him. This group is very small in number. Most people are wise enough and also sufficiently able to understand and follow the right path toward their perfection, although they actually possess different amounts of power and ability. Allah, the Wise, takes these differences into His consideration. He expects more of those who are given more talents or abilities than others. Generally one of the principles in His judgement is:

«أَفْضَلُ الْأَعْمَالِ أَحْمَزُهَا»

It means the most precious deed is the most difficult one. If a person needs more time to learn how to pray or to memorize verses of the Glorious Qur'an, his rewards will be greater and Allah will help him more.

Thus, human beings generally have no difficulty in power and desire or inclination which are needed in every decision and action. But what do you think of the third factor, knowledge? Most difficulties arise from a lack of knowledge, from ignorance. Now let's see which kinds of knowledge we need in our journey towards His pleasure.

Here is a list of facts which we should know:

I) We should know ourselves. How are we created? Why? What are our needs? What are our real desires or motives? What are our faculties and abilities? Are there any tasks or duties for us?

II) What is our present situation? Under what conditions do we live? How is our life in this universe? Is it the only life that we have? Is there any eternal life for us? What good or bad qualities do we have?

III) What is the best position for us? What values and goods can we acquire? What is a perfect man like?

IV) What are the results of our deeds? What is the effect of a single decision or even intention on our fate? Generally, how can we transit from the present situation to the favored and ideal one?

We can summarize these necessary kinds of knowledge as:

knowing our origin,

knowing our present,

knowing our future,

knowing their interactions.

There is a famous tradition from Imam Ali (A.S.) which is closely related to this discussion. Imam Ali said:

«رَحِمَ اللهُ امْرَءً عَرَفَ مِنْ أَيْنَ وَفِي أَيْنَ وَ إِلَى أَيْنَ»

"May God have mercy on the person who has knowledge of where he come from, where he is now, and where he will be."(1)

(1) *Al-Asfar al-Aqliyat al-Arbi'ah*, Vol. 8, p. 355.

Thus, every person needs to know his origin, his present, and his future. Having acquired this knowledge one can behave and manage his life properly. Otherwise he cannot plan for his life because he has not acquired the necessary knowledge for deciding his goals and his way of life. For example, if I did not believe in the Hereafter and eternal life, my goal might be something to be obtained in this world. Or if I did not believe in the relationship between my actions and my happiness on the Day of Judgement, I would not care about my actions. If I believed that I was created through chance and not by Allah, the Wise, I would lose my hope in His help and mercy and would lose my confidence.

Therefore we will speak of the following subjects successively:

a) our origin;

b) our present;

c) our future;

d) the ultimate goal;

e) how to reach our goal.

Our Origin

One of the most fundamental things for a human being to know on the way to perfection is that he is created by Allah for a certain purpose. There are different approaches to this matter. In Islam every person is first of all invited to study this problem and make a certain judgment about it. Nothing less than certainty of belief in Allah is acceptable. There are different ways to prove the existence of Allah and a variety of reasons. But according to Islam it is not a difficult process to understand that Allah, the One, is Existent. Every one, at every level of knowledge and understanding, can settle this problem easily. Usually when a person is a disbeliever it is because of his will, although there might be rare cases of people who have studied this problem seriously and who were really longing for the thruth, but they could not find it. Usually, atheism is just an assumption. Observe the following verse:

﴿أَفِى ٱللَّهِ شَكٌّ فَاطِرِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَاتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ﴾

"Is there doubt about Allah, the maker of the heavens and the earth?" (14:10)

There are many verses in the Glorious Qur'an indicating that there were certain groups of people who were sure about the truth of the teachings of the prophets but denied them.

﴿وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَٱسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْماً وَعُلُوّاً﴾

"And they denied them, though their souls acknowledged them, wrongfully and out of pride." (27:14)

The prophet Musa (A.S.) told Pharaoh:

﴿قَالَ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا أَنزَلَ هَٰؤُلَاءِ إِلَّا رَبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَاتِ وَ ٱلْأَرْضِ بَصَائِرَ...﴾

"He said: Truly you know that none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth has sent down these as clear proof..." (17:102)

But at the same time Pharaoh was denying Allah and was claiming divinity for himself.

Thus, disbelief in Allah is mainly a moral problem rather than an epistemological one. There have been some people who had been accustomed to a certain kind of life and they had comfort and ease in that way of life. So they could not give up their post and their own way easily and observe what the prophets (A.S.) invited them to. Instead of thinking and reasoning they made fun of the prophets (A.S.) and attributed to them such things as madness and magic. They thought, perhaps unconsciously, that if they denied them for once they would be free for all their lives.

﴿بَلْ يُرِيدُ ٱلْإِنسَانُ لِيَفْجُرَ أَمَامَهُ﴾

"Nay, but man desires to continue on as a libertine." (75:5)

But if these people had studied religion seriously , they would have found reality. On the Day of Judgement they will say:

﴿وَقَالُوا لَوْ كُنَّا نَسْمَعُ أَوْ نَعْقِلُ مَا كُنَّا فِي أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ
فَاعْتَرَفُوا بِذَنْبِهِمْ فَسُحْقاً لِأَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ﴾

"And they shall say : Had we but listened or pondered, we should not have been among the inmates of the burning fire. So they shall ackowledge their sins, but far will be (forgiveness) from the inmates of the burning fire." (67:10 & 11)

As you see, their treatment was not a logical or rational one, so their treatment is considered as a sin which they will admit.

We believe in Allah, Who is the Wise. He has created the whole universe for us and has created us to get nearer and nearer to Him. (We will have a discussion about the goal of creation.) Allah is the Beneficent, the Merciful. He is kinder to us than our parents. He is also the most knowing. This is Allah, Who is the Benevolent and at the same time absolutely needless.

We must be proud of having such a Lord. We must try our best to understand His advice to us, which is embodied in the pure religion, Islam. If a pupil has the best master, his ultimate honour is to take his advice and direct his attention towards him and finally to be like him. This fact is nicely expressed in this prayer from Imam Ali (A.S.):

«اِلٰهی کَفٰی بِی عِزّاً اَنْ اَکُونَ لَکَ عَبْداً وَ کَفٰی بِی فَخْراً اَنْ تَکُونَ لِی رَبّاً اَنْتَ کَمٰا اُحِبُّ فَاجْعَلْنِی کَمٰا تُحِبُّ»

"O my God! It suffices me as glory to be your servant and it suffices me as honor to have you as my Lord. You are what I love, so make me what you love."(1)

In Islam every value is due to the relationship with Allah. Our happiness is based on our voluntary devotion to Him. It is like the lives of plants and animals which depend on the light of sun. The sun does not need them, but they cannot survive without the sun.

Thus, we should change the common approach to Divine law or commands. They are not some boring duties assigned to us by Allah in exchange for His favors or His services to us. We are not to perform His commands in response to His blessings. We should know that His commands are only for our benefit. His religion, His prophets and His laws are the most precious blessings that we have ever received. Even thankfulness to Him (*shukr*) is for our benefit.

﴿وَاِذْ تَاَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَاَزِيدَنَّكُمْ﴾

"And when your Lord makes it known: If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more." (14:7)

If we are thankful, we increase our capacity to receive more blessings. With more thankfulness, again more blessings will be brought. It is an endless process. If we are not thankful, it is not harmful to Allah, but decreases our

(1) *Mafatih al-Jinan* and *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 77, p. 402.

capacity for receiving His blessings, so we lose some blessings and if we continue, we will lose more.

We should always recall that He is our Lord, that our real happiness and freedom can be acheived only with our obedience to Him. There are only two ways: to be servants of Allah or to be servants of others such as oppressors or unjust governments or idols. To satisfy Allah is easy, because He is the One and He only wants our happiness. He never makes mistakes and never wants impossible things. But disobedience to Allah leads us to try to obey many many gods, although it is not possible. If one wants money and fame and good position and comfort and the like, no matter how much of them he acquires, he will never be satisfied.

﴿ضَرَبَ ٱللَّهُ مَثَلاً رَجُلاً فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ مُتَشَاكِسُونَ وَرَجُلاً سَلَماً لِرَجُلٍ هَلْ يَسْتَوِيَانِ مَثَلاً﴾

"Allah sets forth an example: There is a slave in whom are (several) partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition?" (39:29)

If we think deeply we will understand that those different and conflicting gods are really our own different extreme desires. So there are two ways : to be servants of Allah or to be sevants of our devious soul.

﴿أَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ ٱتَّخَذَ إِلَٰهَهُ هَوَيٰهُ أَفَأَنتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلاً﴾

"Have you seen him who takes his low desires for his god? Will you then be a protector over him?" (25:43)

﴿أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَٰهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ﴾

"Have you then considered him who takes his low desire for his god, and Allah has made him err having knowledge." (45:23)

Finally, consider the true story which happened during the time of Imam Musa al-Kazim (A.S.). Once Imam (A.S.) was walking in a lane. When he was passing by the door of one house, Imam knew that there was some celebration there in which dancing and forbidden music and wine were used. Then a slave-maid opened the door and came out to put the garbage outside. Imam asked her: "Is the owner of this house a slave or a free person?" She answered: "Free." Imam said: "Surely he is free, because if he were a slave, he would fear his Lord and would not make such a session."

When the slave-maid returned, the owner asked her why she was late. She answered that a man with such and such appearance was passing and questioned me and I replied to him in this way. The owner was shocked and began to think deeply about this sentence: "If he were a slave, he would fear his lord." Suddenly he stood up and without putting on his shoes he went out of the house and looked for that man. When he reached Imam (A.S.) he repented. This man was Bushr ibn Harith, given the title of '*hafi*', meaning shoeless. He became a real believer.(1)

(1) *Al-Kuna wa al-Alqab*, Vol. 2, p. 153, "*al-Hafi*".

Our Present

Having discussed our origin, it is necessary to study our present situation and our future. Now let us turn to the former and the latter will be our topic in the next discussion. In order to certify our goal and practical program to reach that goal, we should know our qualities, capacities, abilities, opportunities and so on.

These are articles of our knowledge about our present. We have studied some of them in the previous chapters such as: good attributes of human beings, the vices attributed to human beings and free-will. Here we just mention some other aspects of our present situation.

Com plete dependence:

In our being (existence) and our life, we are completely dependent on Allah, our Creator. This existence and life is given to us by Him; We are not self-existent. We cannot survive without His will. We are also dependent on material conditions. We cannot exist without water, air, food, light, a certain temperature, and so on.

We cannot have a comfortable life without the help of other members of the society. No one can produce for himself whatever he needs of clothes, shelter (house), furniture, etc.. With the progress and development of human societies these needs increase. Thus, we are dependent on our Creator and his blessings in the material universe and in the social universe.

In our knowledge and understanding, we are not needless. With his God-given intellect every human being is able to understand many facts such as the truth of the religion and the existence of Allah and to acquire some easy and simple information about the nature and the environment around him. With his God-given conscience, every human being understands the general rules of morality, e.g., justice is good and oppression is bad. This theoretical and practical knowledge is common between men in primitive societies and men in advanced ones. But what makes us different from those ancient (earliest) people is what we have received from the prophets, especially the Noble Prophet of Islam, the seal of the prophets, whose message is the last and the most perfect message of our Lord and what we have received from the past generations.

These two sources, religion and inherited knowledge, are very important. They serve as the point of departure for every field in the sciences, arts, literature, technology and positive laws (contracts) which have become very complicated, developed and advanced. For example, today when a chemist starts to work on a project, he uses the results of previous discoveries and inquiries. Many of those achievments have become trivial. Perhaps university students today know more than chemists in the 18th or even

19th century. Or in Islamic sciences, today we use many works on different subjects made by great scholars in the past centuries. Without them we would have to start from the beginning. But we are still on the way. What we know is much less than what we do not know.

Thus, we are completely needful and dependent in our existence, our life and our knowledge. We should not be proud of ourselves. We should not think we are needless or that our knowledge and understanding are perfect.

Mortality of this universe:

This natural universe (*dunya*) is not eternal. It has started at a certain time and will reach to its end at a certain time. This earth, the sun, the moon and all stars and planets will be destroyed before the resurrection. This fact is expressed by many verses of the Glorious Qur'an such as the following:

﴿إِذَا ٱلشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ وَإِذَا ٱلنُّجُومُ ٱنكَدَرَتْ وَإِذَا ٱلْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ وَإِذَا ٱلْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ وَإِذَا ٱلْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ وَإِذَا ٱلْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ وَإِذَا ٱلنُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ﴾

"When the sun is covered, and when the stars darken, and when the mountains are made to pass away, and when the camels are left untended, and when the wild animals are made to go forth, and when the seas are set on fire, and when souls are united,"(81:1-7)

Therefore, everything in this universe has a certain end. Our bodies are mortal. Our physical lives, our powers, our youth, fame and beauty are mortal (perishable). Allah is

eternal and the spiritual (abstract) universe is also endless. Our spirits belong to the spiritual universe and not to the corporeal universe.

﴿وَيَسْئَلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلرُّوحِ قُلِ ٱلرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّى وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلاً﴾

"And they ask you about the spirit. Say: The spirit is from the commands of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little." (17:85)

And if we notice that our spirits make our personality and reality, we easily come to the conclusion that death is not our end. Death is like a gate to another universe. Not only our spirits but also our characters and acts will be preserved. (In the next chapter we will discuss the embodiment of our actions.)

Thus, we cannot obtain eternity and infinite life or endless pleasure in this world. If we want them, we should know they are due to the relationship with Allah. Because Allah is eternal, everything is related to Him (in a narrow sense), is of His signs, and shows Him and so, must be like Him.

﴿كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو ٱلْجَلَالِ وَٱلْإِكْرَامِ﴾

"Everyone on it must pass away. And there will endure for ever the face (wajh) of your Lord, the Lord of glory and honor." (55:26,27)

﴿وَلَا تَدْعُ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَٰهاً ءَاخَرَ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ كُلُّ شَىْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ لَهُ ٱلْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ﴾

"And call not with Allah any other god; there is no god but He; every thing is perishable but His Face (wajh); He is the judgment, and to Him you shall be brought back." (28:88)

In Arabic "*wajh*" is that part of any thing through which you can confront that thing. For example if you confront the foot or hand of a person, you are not confronting and meeting him, but when you confront his face and have a kind of face to face sight, you confront and meet him. This is why in Arabic our face is called "*wajh*". In the case of Allah, we know that He has no body, so it is not necessary to look in a special direction to meet Him. In the Glorious Qur'an this fact is expressed in the following verse:

﴿وَلِلَّهِ ٱلْمَشْرِقُ وَٱلْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا۟ فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ ٱللَّهِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

"And for Allah is the East and the West, therefore, whither you turn, thither is Allah's Face (wajh); Surely Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing." (2:115)

As we can consider and use everything to know Him, to reach Him, so every thing can be called "*wajh Allah*". Those things which are considered in this way will never be destroyed as we saw in the verses: (55:26 & 27) and (28:88). So every action or even intention which you have for His pleasure will be preserved. If you give some money to a poor person, this money will be destroyed but that aspect of this money or in other words that aspect of this action which is "*wajh Allah*" will be preserved forever.

True nature of this life

This present life in itself is one of the blessings of Allah. It is the only opportunity that we have. If we want to purify ourselves we should utilize it in the best way. Every moment of this life is so precious that no price can be considered for it. There is a famous tradition from the Noble Prophet (S):

«مَنِ اَسْتَوىٰ يَوْماهُ فَهُوَ مَغْبُونٌ»

"Whoever has not made any improvement in one day has lost."(1)

In many prayers taught by our Imams we find the request for a long life. On the other hand, the Glorious Qur'an teaches us that unbelievers who do not believe in His religion and the day of resurrection are afraid of death. They wish they could live for a thousand years or even more.

﴿وَلَتَجِدَنَّهُمْ اَحْرَصَ النَّاسِ عَلىٰ حَيٰوةٍ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ اَشْرَكُوا يَوَدُّ اَحَدُهُمْ لَوْ يُعَمَّرُ اَلْفَ سَنَةٍ وَمٰا هُوَ بِمُزَحْزِحِهِ مِنَ الْعَذٰابِ اَنْ يُعَمَّرَ وَاللّٰهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمٰا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

"And you will most certainly find them the greediest of men for life (greedier) than even those who are polytheists; every one of them loves that he should be granted a life of a thousand years, and his being granted a long life will in no way remove him further off from the chastisement, and Allah sees what they do." (2:96)

(1) The same idea is also narrated from Imam Ali (A.S.) and from Imam Sadiq (A.S.). See *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 71, p. 173 and Vol. 77, p. 378.

Thus, both believers and unbelievers like to live, but their reasons and their attitudes towards death and life are completely different. Unbelievers or those who claim to be believers but do not pracitce the faith enjoy this life because they think that there is no other life or because they have not obeyed Allah and have commited sins or crimes, so they are afraid of His punishment. These people like this universe and this life just for themselves. They are engaged in a circular life. They work to earn money, to buy food and clothes and to prepare a shelter for themselves. And If we ask them: Why do you need food and so on? they will say: "Otherwise, we cannot work; we cannot live."

However, for real believers this universe is precious because they can reach His pleasure, they can worship Him. The only opportunity for human beings to act and to improve themselves is in this life. After death, we cannot perform new acts. Today we can act and there is no judgement (reckoning) and tomorrow there will be judgement (reckoning) and no action. It is possible to do something in this life which will continuously bring His rewards. For example, if a person builds a school or hospital or the like with pure intention or if a person spreads his knowledge through teaching or writing or the like or if he has trained good children he will receive more and more rewards after his death. But it is obvious that even in these cases, there is no chance for performing actions after death.

Therefore, this life is very valuable. According to Islamic traditions, one of the first questions on the day of the resurrection is about the life, and another question is about youth.(1) It shows the special importance of this period of

(1) See *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 7, p. 258.

life. To see a clear picture of the Islamic attitude towards life, it's nice to consider this prayer of the fourth Imam (A.S.):

«وَعَمِّرْنِی مٰا کٰانَ عُمْرِی بِذْلَةً فِی طٰاعَتِكَ فَـاِذٰا کٰـانَ مَـرْتَعاً لِلشَّیْطٰانِ فَاقْبِضْنِی اِلَیْكَ قَبْلَ اَنْ یَسْبِقَ مَقْتُكَ اِلَیَّ اَوْ یَسْـتَحْكِمَ غَضَبُكَ عَلَیَّ»

"And let me live as long as my life is a free gift in obeying You, but if my life should become a pasture for Satan, seize me to Yourself before Your hatred overtakes me or Your wrath against me becomes firm!"(1)

And to get a clear picture of the ordinary attitude towards life, one may consider this verse of the Glorious Qur'an:

﴿اِعْلَمُوا اَنَّمَا اَلْحَیٰوةُ اَلدُّنْیا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ وَزِیـنَةٌ وَتَـفٰاخُرٌ بَـیْنَكُمْ وَتَكٰاثُرٌ فِی اَلْاَمْـوٰالِ وَالْاَوْلاٰدِ كَـمَثَلِ غَـیْثٍ اَعْـجَبَ اَلْكُـفّٰارَ نَبٰاتُهُ ثُمَّ یَهِیجُ فَتَرٰاهُ مُصْفَرّاً ثُـمَّ یَكُـونَ حُـطٰاماً وَفِـی اَلْاٰخِـرَةِ عَذٰابٌ شَدِیدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنَ اَللّٰهِ وَرِضْـوٰانٌ وَمَـا اَلْـحَیٰوةُ اَلـدُّنْیا اِلّٰا مَتٰاعُ اَلْغُرُورِ﴾

"Know that this world's life is only play and amusement and adornment and boasting among yourselves, and a rivalry in the multiplication of wealth and children, like the rain, whose causing the vegetation to grow, pleases the husbandmen then it withers away so that you will see it become

(1) *The Psalms of Islam*, p. 68.

yellow, then it becomes dried up and broken down; and in the hereafter is a severe chastisement and (also) forgiveness from Allah and (His) pleasure; and this world's life is naught but means of deception." (57:20)

Without faith, this life can be divided into five parts. Some scholars consider these five parts in a chronological order, so they are five succeeding phases. During the childhood the main activity is playing '*la'ib*'. Then it is the turn of '*lahw*' , including all the activities a person does just to enjoy himself in his free time or, in other words, just to make himself busy, like listening to music or watching movies or solving puzzles or collecting things or reading novels without any purpose or aim. Then when a person becomes a youth and ready for marriage, he takes care of his body and hair and generally his beauty. He spends much time in front of mirrors or in the barber shops or in the clothes shops. This is the period of adornment, '*zinah*'. Then when he graduateds, finds a job, and gets married, the youth starts to exalt himself over others and to be proud of himself. This is the period of '*tafakhur*'. And finally after trying his best and working for many years he thinks about the results of his life: children, money, property and fame. He wishes to be the best. This is the period of '*takathur*'.

This verse shows that we should not forget our happiness in the Hereafter and we should not allow ordinary affairs to deceive us and capture our attention. Otherwise we will be lost in the chain of trivial wants and activities such as playing and so on. This part of our discussion will conclude with a phrase from Imam Ali (A.S.) about the God-wary, '*muttaqin*':

«صَبَرُوا أَيّاماً قَصِيرَةً أَعْقَبَتْهُمْ رَاحَةً طَوِيلَةً تِجارَةٌ مُرْبِحَةٌ يَسَّرَهَا لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَرَادَتْهُمُ الدُّنْيا فَلَمْ يُرِيدُوهَا وَأَسَرَتْهُمْ فَفَدَوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ مِنْهَا»

"They endured (hardship) for a short while and in consequence they secured comfort for a long time. It is a beneficial transaction that Allah made easy for them. The world aimed at them but they did not aim at it. It captured them but they were freed from it by ransom."(1)

(1) *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Sermon 191.

Our Future

We mean by this title our situation after death. We can define death as the separation of the spirit from the body. Sleeping is to some extent like death. There is however a difference. During sleep the spirit is still connected with the body, but to a lesser degree than while waking. But during the death the spirit is disconnected from the body and belongs to another body which has the qualities of a material body like shape and size without the mass. Philosophers compare it with the bodies of dreams. They call them *'barzakhi'* or *'mithali'*. This continues until the resurrection. Then the spirit will belong to another body which is like the body in its present situation. In this way we believe in the physical-spiritual resurrection. This topic is very controversial. Even those people who believe in the physical-spiritual resurrection have reached no consensus about the nature of the bodies in that universe. But what we have said can be easily understood from the Glorious Qur'an and Islamic traditions on which great Islamic scholars agree, and this suffices us in our discussion. As we know, the most important part of our being which makes

our personality is the spirit. All rewards and punishments are in one way or another related to the spirit. The body is just a means for the spirit. Note the following two verses of the Glorious Qur'an.

﴿قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُمْ مَلَكُ ٱلْمَوْتُ ٱلَّذِى وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ﴾

"Say: The angel of death who is given charge of you shall take you."(32:11)

﴿ٱللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى ٱلْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَٱلَّتِى لَمْ تَمُتْ فِى مَنَامِهَا فَيُمْسِكُ ٱلَّتِى قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا ٱلْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ ٱلْأُخْرَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى﴾

"Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep; then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death and sends the others back till an appointed term."(39:42)

These verses show that death is not an end of our being, that during death our spirits will be completely received by Allah or according to the other verse we will be completely received by Him(1) and that sleeping is to some extent like death. These verses answer many questions about the resurrection, but they are not closely related to our discussion.

Heaven and hell

There are many many facts about heaven and hell. We

(1) In Arabic the term '*tawaffi*' means to take (or to receive) something completely. Comparing these two verses we understand that the soul (spirit) is equal to the self, because in the verse (32:11) the object of taking is ourselves and in the verse (39:42) it is the souls.

try to explain only those facts which help us in our study. Heaven and hell have been created now. If we had purified ourselves, we would be able to see them. Imam Ali says about the pious:

«هُمْ وَٱلْجَنَّةُ كَمَنْ قَدْ رَآهَا فَهُمْ فِيهَا مُنَعَّمُونَ وَهُمْ وَٱلنَّارُ كَمَنْ قَدْ رَآهَا وَهُمْ فِيهَا مُعَذَّبُونَ»

"To them paradise is as though they have seen it and are enjoying its favours. To them hell is also as if they have seen it and are suffering punishment in it."(1)

The Glorious Qur'an also speaks about hell:

﴿كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ ٱلْيَقِينِ لَتَرَوُنَّ ٱلْجَحِيمَ﴾

"Nay! If you had known with a certain knowledge you should most certainly have seen hell." (102:5 & 6)

In this way we can say that our future is now present. Whoever is good, is now in heaven and criminals or sinners are now in hell. I hope the reader remembers that the companion of the Noble Prophet (S) who reached certainty said that he could declare among those who were with the Prophet, who were people of hell and who were people of heaven. The Prophet (S) has also said that during the ascension, *'mi'raj'* he saw workers (angels) planting trees. Sometimes they were working and sometimes they stopped working. Then he was told that when a person recites

(1) *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Sermon 191.

certain invocations of God a tree is planted for him and when he stops no tree is planted for him. This tradition, like many other traditions shows that punishments and rewards are synchronous with the actions.

Three kinds of relationships can be conceived between acts and rewards or punishments:

A- Conventional relationship: Ordinary rewards or punishments are decided (defined) by some law-makers. So they vary in different societies. For example, penalties for breaking traffic laws are from this kind.

B- Causal relationship: Sometimes rewards or punishments are effects of the acts. For example, when a person drinks wine, one of his punishments is loss of his health; or if a student studies well one of his rewards is to learn his lessons. The loss of health and knowledge are effects brought into being by those acts.

C- Unity: Sometimes rewards or punishments are nothing other than the actions. They are just the realities of those actions made manifest in another universe. According to the Glorious Qur'an the realities of the acts will be seen in the Hereafter. This is what we mean by the embodiment of deeds (*tajassum al-a'mal*).

﴿يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ ٱلنَّاسُ أَشْتَاتاً لِيُرَوا أَعْمَالَهُمْ فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْراً يَرَهُ وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرّاً يَرَهُ﴾

"On that day men shall come forth in sundry bodies that they may be shown their works. So he who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it. And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it." (99:6-8)

﴿اَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ اَمْوالَ الْيَتامىٰ ظُلْماً اِنَّما يَأْكُلُونَ فِى بُطُونِهِمْ نَاراً وَسَيَصْلَوْنَ سَعِيراً﴾

"(As for) those who swallow the property of the orphans unjustly, surely they only swallow fire into their bellies and they shall enter burning fire." (4:10)

According to these and some other verses we will see our acts themselves. If we had that sight today we would be able to see their realities today. Whoever is swallowing the property of the orphans unjustly is really swallowing fire now. Whoever is back-biting is really eating the flesh of his dead brother or sister now. So we should take care of our acts, otherwise we will enter hell just now (not only in the future). If we think constantly about the ugliness of the sins and their realities we will not commit any sin.

Endless future

Every person lives in this universe for a limited time. Death is the unquestionable end for this life. Nothing can save men from death.

﴿اَيْنَما تَكُونُوا يُدْرِكْكُمُ الْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُمْ فِى بُرُوجٍ مُشَيَّدَةٍ﴾

"wherever you are, death will overtake you, though you are in lofty towers." (4:78)

After Barzakh those who enter heaven will be there forever.

﴿مَنْ خَشِيَ الرَّحْمٰنَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَجاءَ بِقَلْبٍ مُنِيبٍ اُدْخُلُوها بِسَلامٍ ذٰلِكَ يَوْمُ الْخُلُودِ﴾

"Those who are in awe of the Beneficent God in secret and come with a penitent heart: Enter it in peace, that is the day of abiding." (50:33 & 34)

Those people who enter hell are of two kinds. Disbelievers who are against the truth will stay there forever. But those believers who will enter hell for their bad deeds will finally enter heaven after they will have been cleansed.

﴿فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ شَقُوا فَفِى ٱلنَّارِ لَهُمْ فِيهَا زَفِيرٌ وَشَهِيقٌ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ رَبُّكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ فَعَّالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ سُعِدُوا فَفِى ٱلْجَنَّةِ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ رَبُّكَ عَطَآءً غَيْرَ مَجْذُوذٍ﴾

"So as to those who are unhappy, they shall be in the fire; for them shall be sighing and groaning in it, abiding therein so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord please; surely your Lord is the mighty doer of what He intends. And as to those who are made happy, they shall be in the garden, abiding in it as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord please; a gift which shall never be cut off."(11:106-108)

﴿وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَآؤُهُمُ ٱلطَّٰغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ ٱلنُّورِ إِلَى ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ أُولَٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ﴾

"And (as to) those who disbelieve, their guardians are Shaytans who take them out of the light into the darkness; they are the inmates of the fire, in it they shall abide."(2:257)

Infinite rewards or punishments

A group of people will enter heaven and stay there forever. This entrance might be immediately after the judgment or after some interval. The other group will enter hell and stay there forever. So in respect to time there is no limitation.

There is also no limitation in respect to the intensity (the quantity and the quality). We cannot compare His rewards with the pleasurable things in this universe. According to the Glorious Qur'an there is whatever they like in heaven.

﴿فِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهِيهِ ٱلْأَنفُسُ وَتَلَذُّ ٱلْأَعْيُنُ﴾

"Therein shall be what their souls yearn after and (wherein) the eyes shall delight." (43:71)

﴿لَهُمْ مَا يَشَاؤُونَ فِيهَا وَلَدَيْنَا مَزِيدٌ﴾

"They have therein what they wish and with Us is more yet." (50:35)

Not only they can get and enjoy whatever they want, but also there are things which they were not able to conceive. We usually wish what we have seen or generally experienced in advance. For example, people like to have a big house (with a big garden in a size and with qualities which cannot be found in this world). But there are still some blessings in heaven which are not familiar to men so they will receive them without any previous want or request.

﴿فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُم مِّن قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

"So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes; a reward for what they did." (32:17)

According to traditions there is in Paradise what no eye has seen and no ear has heard and no heart has conceived (imagined).(1)

We cannot understand the torments either. The fire there is not comparable with ordinary fires. That fire burns the spirit as well as the body.

﴿وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ نَارُ اللهِ الْمُوقَدَةُ الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى الْأَفْئِدَةِ إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُؤْصَدَةٌ فِي عَمَدٍ مُمَدَّدَةٍ﴾

"And what will make you realize what the crushing disaster is? It is the fire kindled by Allah, which rises above the hearts. Surely it shall be closed over upon them in extended columns." (104:5-9)

Those who enter hell and suffer its torments wish to die. They think in this way they can get rid of the torments.

﴿وَنَادَوْا يَا مَالِكُ لِيَقْضِ عَلَيْنَا رَبُّكَ قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ مَاكِثُونَ﴾

"And they shall call out: O Malik! Let your Lord make an end of us. He shall say: Surely you shall tarry."(43:77)

﴿ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَى﴾

"Then therein he shall neither live nor die." (87:13)

Whenever the fire burns their skin, Allah renews their skin to suffer again.

(1) See *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 33, p. 81.

﴿كُلَّمَا نَضِجَتْ جُلُودُهُمْ بَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجُلُودٍ اٰخَرِينَ﴾

"So often as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins."(4:56)

Listen to Imam Ali (A.S.) in his prayer when he says:

«يَا رَبِّ وَأَنْتَ تَعْلَمُ ضَعْفِي عَنْ قَلِيلٍ مِنْ بَلاءِ اَلدُّنْيَا وَعُقُوبَاتِهَا وَمَا يَجْرِي فِيهَا مِنَ اَلْمَكَارِهِ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا عَلَىٰ أَنَّ ذٰلِكَ بَلاءٌ وَمَكْرُوهٌ قَلِيلٌ مَكْثُهُ يَسِيرٌ بَقَاؤُهُ قَصِيرٌ مُدَّتُهُ فَكَيْفَ اِحْتِمَالِي لِبَلاءِ اَلاٰخِرَةِ وَجَلِيلِ وُقُوعِ اَلْمَكَارِهِ فِيهَا وَهُوَ بَلاءٌ تَطُولُ مُدَّتُهُ وَيَدُومُ مَقَامُهُ وَلاَ يُخَفَّفُ عَنْ أَهْلِهِ لِأَنَّهُ لاَ يَكُونُ إِلاَّ عَنْ غَضَبِكَ وَاَنْتِقَامِكَ وَسَخَطِكَ وَهٰذَا مَا لاَ تَقُومُ لَهُ اَلسَّمٰوَاتُ وَاَلْأَرْضُ»

"O My Lord! And You know that I cannot endure the tribulations and punishments of this world and whatever ordeals happen to its inhabitants, while they are not so difficult and so long. So how can I endure the tribulations of the Hereafter and its great ordeals, while they are very long in their time and endless and their sufferers are not given any respite, because they are from of Your anger and vengeance and discontent and These cannot be withstood by the heavens and the earth."(1)

(1) *The Prayer of Kumayl.*

The Ultimate Goal

Having understood our origin, our present and our future we can project some light on the topic of our ultimate goal. The following points can be mentioned as examples:

A) We are created by Allah, the Wise. We are not created through chance or without any purpose.

B) Our Creator is absolutely needless. So whatever is considered by Him as the goal of our creation is completely to our benefit. We should try our best to actualize whatever He wants for us.

C) This universe is perishable. Everything in this universe is also perishable. So it is not as precious as ourselves. We can live forever since our spirits are not material and mortal. So we should search to find our goal in something other than this material life. We must avoid becoming engaged in a circular life.

D) An endless future is awaiting us. The pleasures or pains in the Hereafter are not comparable with those of this universe. Complete happiness can be experienced only in Paradise.

E) Our future completely depends on our present.

F) In Islam every value is debted to the relationship with Allah. Our happiness is based on our voluntary devotion to Him. If we are close to Him nothing can threaten us.

It seems that these points are enough for everyone to decide for himself. We shall try, however, to consider this issue from another point of view and then we will concentrate on the concept of closeness to Allah and its consequences.

Allah is absolutely needless. He is also the Wise. So He creates purposefully. In the Glorious Qur'an it is much emphasized that creation is not purposeless.

﴿لَوْ اَرَدْنَا اَنْ نَتَّخِذَ لَهْواً لاَتَّخَذْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا اِنْ كُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ﴾

"Had We wished to make a diversion, We would have made it from before Ourselves: by no means would We do (it)."(21:17)

﴿اَفَحَسِبْتُمْ اَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثاً وَ اَنَّكُمْ اِلَيْنَا لاَتُرْجَعُونَ﴾

"What! Did you then think that We had created you in vain and that you shall not be returned to Us?" (23:115)

The benefit of creation is for creatures not the Creator, because the Creator is needless. Allah is able to create the opportunity for them to reach perfection. He is the Knowing so He knows how to do everything. He is also the Benevolent. Therefore He creates.

If we think deeply we will find that He has created the universe because of Himself. Nothing can influence Him or His decision. Nothing other than Him is to be considered.

This is what Islamic philosophers mean by saying that in the case of Allah, the final cause and the efficient cause are the same. But we can consider some middle goals in the chain of goals. So then it is the turn of the goodness of the creation itself. It means that Allah primarily has created the universe because of Himself and secondly because the creation and bringing into existence is better than nothing. Then comes the turn of providing the opportunity for perfection to creatures and then different (intellectual) stages of this process.

Among all creatures human beings can reach the highest levels of perfection or closeness to Allah. Thereby all beings are created for human beings, that is, they are means for the existence of the human beings. They are good in themselves and they have some degree of perfection, but only man can improve himself through his free will, and we know that the perfection brought into beings voluntarily is more precious.

﴿هُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعاً﴾

"He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth."(2:29)

﴿وَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعاً مِنْهُ﴾

"And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, all, from Himself." (45:13)

This world is created to enable us to follow our spiritual journey. Here is the place of test, '*imtihan*'. Although Allah has created everything for us and created us to test us, these are only means for the existence of real human beings. This

is just like the example of school. Everything, including classes, chairs and blackboards are created for students. Students are asked to try their best to pass exams successfully. But this in itself is not important. Only those good students who pass the exams successfully actualize the hope and aim of the school makers or educational staff. In the Glorious Qur'an in one place Allah says:

﴿ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلْمَوْتَ وَٱلْحَيٰوةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْغَفُورُ﴾

"Who created death and life that He may try you which of you is best in deeds; and He is the Mighty, the Forgiving." (67:2)

Only those who are good and have good deeds are primarily intended. So in another verse Allah says:

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ ٱلْجِنَّ وَٱلْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ مَا أُرِيدُ مِنْهُم مِّن رِّزْقٍ وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَن يُطْعِمُونِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلرَّزَّاقُ ذُو ٱلْقُوَّةِ ٱلْمَتِينُ﴾

"And I have not created the jinn and the men except to serve Me. I do not desire from them any sustenance and I do not desire that they should feed me. Surely Allah is the Bestower of sustenance, the Lord of power, the Strong." (51:56-58)

Allah wants us to worship Him and this implies to know Him and finally to get close to Him. According to some views the phrase 'ليعبدون' is interpreted as 'ليعرفون' meaning that I have created them only to know me. This fact can be also understood from the verse (65:12). There is a divine

saying, *hadith qudsi*[1], which is very famous, that is,:

«كُنْتُ كَنْزاً مَخْفِيّاً فَاَحْبَبْتُ اَنْ اُعْرَفَ فَخَلَقْتُ اَلْخَلْقَ لِكَيْ اُعْرَفَ»

"I was a hidden (secret or unknown) treasure, so I liked to be known; therefore, I created men to be known."[2]

Imam Husayn (A.S.) in the Prayer of *'Arafah* says:

«اِلٰهِی عَلِمْتُ بِاخْتِلاٰفِ اَلْاٰثٰارِ وَتَنَقُّلاٰتِ اَلْاَطْوٰارِ اَنَّ مُرٰادَكَ مِنِّی اَنْ تَتَعَرَّفَ اِلَیَّ فِی كُلِّ شَیْءٍ حَتّٰی لاٰ اَجْهَلَكَ فِی شَیْءٍ»

"O Allah! Through the variety of your signs (in the world of being) and the changes in states and conditions, I found that the purpose is to make yourself known to me in everything, so that I would not ignore you in anything."

This is one of the highest levels of perfection for men to know Allah in everything. This recalls to mind what Imam Ali (A.S.) said:

«مٰا رَاَیْتُ شَیْئاً اِلاّٰ وَقَدْ رَاَیْتُ اَللّٰهَ قَبْلَهُ وَ بَعْدَهُ وَ مَعَهُ»

"I did not see anything except that I saw Allah before it and with it and after it."[3]

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(1) Divinely-inspired utterances of the Prophet (S) differ with those which comprise the text of the Glorious Qur'an in that in the latter both the meaning and words are God's, but in the former only the meaning is God's and words are those of the Prophet (*Ta'rifat* by Jurjani).

(2) *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 87, p. 344.

(3) *Al-Asfar al-Aqliyat al-Arbi'ah*, Vol. 1, p. 117, Vol. 4, p. 479 and

These people who are the perfect men *'insan kamil'*, are really the goal of the creation. In a divine saying Allah says to the Prophet (S):

«لَوْلاكَ لَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْاَفْلاكَ»

"If you were not there I would not create the world."(1)

The perfect man or woman actualizes the goal. Perfection is nothing but closeness to Allah and receiving His pleasure. For He is the most perfect being and the source of all values and goods. The following are results of the closeness to Him which come after His pleasure:

A) Material blessings: If a person or a society obeys Allah and gets His pleasure he or it will receive more and more blessings.

﴿وَلَوْ اَنَّ اَهْلَ الْقُرىٰ اٰمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوا لَفَتَحْنا عَلَيْهِمْ بَرَكاتٍ مِنَ السَّماءِ وَالْاَرْضِ وَ لٰكِنْ كَذَّبُوا فَاَخَذْناهُمْ بِما كانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ﴾

"And if the people of the towns had believed and guarded (against evil) we would certainly have opened up for them blessings from the heaven and the earth, but they rejected, so we overtook them for what they had earned." (7:96)

The prophet Nuh (A.S.) told his people:

﴿فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ اِنَّهُ كانَ غَفّاراً يُرْسِلِ السَّماءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْراراً وَيُمْدِدْكُمْ بِاَمْوالٍ وَبَنِينَ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ جَنّاتٍ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ اَنْهاراً﴾

← Vol. 5, p. 27.

(1) *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 15, p. 28.

"Then I said: Ask forgiveness of your Lord, surely He is the most Forgiving. He will send down upon you the cloud, pouring down abundance of rain and help you with wealth and sons and make for you gardens, and make for you rivers." (71:10-12)

B) Social justice: If a society obeys Allah and follows His laws there will be no oppression. Every person will have the opportunity to have a comfortable life and to enjoy the results and benefits of his activities.

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ﴾

"Certainly we sent our apostles with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the balance that men may conduct themselves with equity." (57:25)

According to above verse one of the aims of the prophethood is to establish social justice, *'qist'*. In such societies people can be comfortable and they can easily perform their religious duties to reach His pleasure.

C) Freedom from all obstacles in the process of self-improvment: To be religious means to be devoted to Allah and divine values. At the same time it means to be free from false gods in the society, bad habits or customs, bad social norms or laws and superstitions. In the Glorious Qur'an we find that one of the works of the prophets is to free people.

﴿الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوباً

عِنْدَهُمْ فِى ٱلتَّوْرَاةِ وَٱلْإِنْجِيلِ يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ ٱلْمُنْكَرِ وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ ٱلطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْخَبَائِثَ وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَٱلْأَغْلَٰلَ ٱلَّتِى كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ فَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِهِۦ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَٱتَّبَعُوا ٱلنُّورَ ٱلَّذِى أُنزِلَ مَعَهُۥٓ أُولَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ﴾

"Those who follow the Apostle-Prophet, the Ummi, whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel, (who) enjoins them good and forbids them evil, and makes lawful to them the good things and makes unlawful to them impure things, and removes from them their burden and the shackles which were upon them; so(as for) those who believe in him and honor him and help him, and follow the light which has been sent down with him, these it is that are the succesful (happy)". (7:157)

D) Peace and confidence: Whenever a man gets close to Allah, the Lord of all universe, the Great, all other things appear light and small to him. He feels that he is under His protection so nothing can be harmful to him. He does not suffer any difficulties or pain except that they are to his own benefit and Allah will give him rewards.

There are many people in the world who have comfortable lives, but they suffer a lack of peace and confidence in their lives to the extent that some of them resort to alchoholic drinks or narcotic drugs to decrease their spiritual pain or really to decrease their self-consciousness. And finally they might commit suicide.

﴿وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِى فَإِنَّ لَهُۥ مَعِيشَةً ضَنكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُۥ يَوْمَ

﴿اَلْقِيامَةِ اَعْمىٰ﴾

"And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall surely be a straitened life, and he will be raised on the day of resurrection, blind." (20:124)

﴿اَلا بِذِكْرِ اللهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ اَلْقُلُوبُ﴾

"Now surely by Allah's remembrance are the hearts at rest." (13:28)

﴿يا اَيَّتُهَا اَلنَّفْسُ اَلْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ اِرْجِعِي اِلىٰ رَبِّكِ راضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً﴾

"O soul that art at rest! Return to your Lord well- pleased (with him), well-pleasing (Him)." (89:27 & 28)

Imam Ali (A.S.) says that the reason why the pious are not afraid of losing anything and everything becomes easy for them is that they have appreciated His greatness so nothing else is important in their views. If you are on a beach close to the ocean you do not pay any attention to a glass of water in the hand of a baby. Imam Ali (A.S.) says about the pious, muttaqin:

«عَظُمَ اَلْخالِقُ فِي اَنْفُسِهِمْ فَصَغُرَ ما دُونَهُ فِي اَعْيُنِهِمْ»

"The greatness of the Creator is seated in their hearts and so everything else appears small in their eyes."(1)

There is still another reason why peace and confidence come after faith and the closeness to Allah. Human beings

(1) *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Sermon 191.

are innately thirsty to reach the infinite good or perfection. They may make mistakes in distinguishing their goods, e.g., they may consider money or fame or power as their goods. so they try to obtain each of them more and more without any limitation, but nothing can provide the real answer to their innate need (or love). Those who are very rich or very powerful suffer a lack of spiritual peace. Only closeness to Allah can satisfy them. Let's submit our hearts with Imam Sajjad (A.S.) while he prays:

«وَغُلَّتِي لاٰ يُبَرِّدُهٰا اِلاَّ وَصْلُكَ وَلَـوْعَتِي لاٰ يُـطْفِيهٰا اِلاَّ لِـقٰاؤُكَ وَشَوْقِي اِلَيْكَ لاٰ يَبُلُّهُ اِلاَّ اَلنَّظَرُ اِلىٰ وَجْهِكَ وَقَرٰارِي لاٰ يَقِرُّ دُونَ دُنُوِّي مِنْكَ»

"Nothing will cool my burning thirst but reaching You, quench my ardour but meeting You, damp my yearning but gazing upon Your Face (wajh), settle my settling place without closeness to You."(1)

E) Entrance to the universe of the light: Through closeness to Allah man is saved from all evils. A person who has experienced a relationship with the source of all goods cannot be pleased with low things. Allah also helps those who want to keep their relationship with Him. He strengthens their faith, He saves them from being lost (going astray).

So they enjoy special guidance. The Glorious Qur'an says:

﴿اَللّٰهُ وَلِيُّ اَلَّذِينَ اٰمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ اَلظُّلُمٰاتِ اِلَى اَلنُّورِ﴾

(1) *The Psalms of Islam*, p. 251, 252.

"Allah is the guardian of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light." (2:257)

﴿يَهْدِي بِهِ ٱللَّهُ مَنِ ٱتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ ٱلسَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ ٱلظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ﴾

"With it Allah guides him who will follow His pleasure into the ways of safety and brings them out of utter darkness into light by His will and guides them to the right path."(5:16)

These verses are just some samples and there are many more in the Glorious Qur'an. This fact is also expressed in traditions and divine light is asked for in prayers. For example, we see this phrase in *Al-Munajat al-Sha'baniyah*:

«إِلٰهِي هَبْ لِي كَمَالَ ٱلِانْقِطَاعِ إِلَيْكَ وَأَنِرْ أَبْصَارَ قُلُوبِنَا بِضِيَاءِ نَظَرِهَا إِلَيْكَ حَتَّىٰ تَخْرِقَ أَبْصَارُ ٱلْقُلُوبِ حُجُبَ ٱلنُّورِ فَتَصِلَ إِلَىٰ مَعْدِنِ ٱلْعَظَمَةِ وَتَصِيرَ أَرْوَاحُنَا مُعَلَّقَةً بِعِزِّ قُدْسِكَ»

" My God! Make me completely cut off from all else but You and enlighten the vision of our hearts with the radiance of looking at You until the vision of our hearts penetrates the veils of light and reaches the Source of Grandeur and set our spirits to be suspended by the glory of Your sanctity."(1)

F) Guardianship: Through obedience to Allah and worshiping Him one can reach the position of being His

(1) *Mafatih al-Jinan.*

representative on the earth. One can obtain lordship of the universe and have generative guardianship. So one can do whatever one wants. (For a further discussion refer to Ch. 7.) We have already seen this tradition:

> *"The servantship is a substance whose essence is the lordship."*(1)

There is a divine tradition (*hadith qudsi*) saying:

> «عَبْدِی اَطِعْنِی اَجْعَلْكَ مَثَلِی اَنَا حَیٌّ لاٰ اَمُوتُ اَجْعَلْكَ حَیّاً لاٰ تَمُوتُ اَنَا غَنِیٌّ لاٰ اَفْتَقِرُ اَجْعَلْكَ غَنِیّاً لاٰ تَفْتَقِرُ اَنَا مَهْمٰا اَشٰاءُ یَكُونُ اَجْعَلْكَ مَهْمٰا تَشٰاءُ یَكُونُ»
>
> *"My servant, obey Me that I make you an example of Myself. I am alive and never die so I make you alive and never die. I am rich and never become poor so I make you become rich and never poor. Whatever I want it will be, so I make you in the way that whatever you want it will be there."*(2)

G) Complete knowledge: One of the results of getting close to Allah is to be equipped with complete knowledge. This knowledge cannot be acquired through learning or studying. This is the real knowledge of which Imam Sadiq (A.S.) says:

> «لَیْسَ اَلْعِلْمُ بِالتَّعَلُّمِ اِنَّمٰا هُوَ نُورٌ یَقَعُ فِی قَلْبِ مَنْ یُرِیدُ اَللّٰهُ تَبٰارَكَ وَ تَعٰالیٰ اَنْ یَهْدِیَهُ»
>
> *"The knowledge cannot be acquired by*

(1) See p. 62 of this volume.

(2) *Al-Jawahir Al-Saniyah fi al-Ahadith al-Qudsiyah* by Hurr 'Amili, p. 284.

learning. It is just a light which appears in the heart of he whom Allah, the Blessed and Sublime, wills to guide."(1)

All people are asked to learn and acquire ordinary knowledge, but it is not enough. The real knowledge which revives our hearts and guarantees our happiness is what comes through the faith and being close to Allah. In the Glorious Qur'an we recite:

﴿اِتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ وَ يُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللّٰهُ﴾

"Be wary of Allah, and Allah will teach you." (2:282)

There is a famous report from the Prophet (S). He says that on the night of *mi'raj* he asked Allah about the status ot the believers. Here is a part of the answer:

«وَمَا يَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ عَبْدٌ مَنْ عِبادِي بِشَيءٍ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا افْتَرَضْتُ عَلَيْهِ وَإِنَّهُ لَيَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالنَّافِلَةِ حَتّىٰ أُحِبَّهُ فَإِذا أَحْبَبْتُهُ كُنْتُ إِذاً سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يَبْصُرُ بِهِ وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي يَبْطِشُ بِها إِنْ دَعانِي أَجَبْتُهُ وَإِنْ سَأَلَنِي أَعْطَيْتُهُ»

"None of My servants will seek closeness to Me by that which is more dear to Me than things I have made wajib to him. Then with the nawafil (the recommended), he will seek closeness, so that I would love him. When I love him, I will be the ear with which he hears, the eyes with which he sees, and the hand with which he strikes. If he calls Me, I will answer his call, and if he makes a request, I

(1) *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 1, p. 225, No. 17.

will grant it."(1)

«فَإِذَا أَحَبَّنِي أَحْبَبْتُهُ [وَحَبَّبْتُهُ إِلَىٰ خَلْقِي] وَأَفْتَحُ عَيْنَ قَلْبِهِ إِلَىٰ جَلَالِي [وَعَظَمَتِي] وَلاَ أُخْفِي عَلَيْهِ [عِلْمَ] خَاصَّةِ خَلْقِي وَأُنَاجِيهِ فِي ظُلَمِ اللَّيْلِ وَنُورِ النَّهَارِ حَتَّىٰ يَنْقَطِعَ حَدِيثُهُ مَعَ الْمَخْلُوقِينَ وَمُجَالَسَتُهُ مَعَهُمْ وَأُسْمِعُهُ كَلَامِي وَكَلَامَ مَلَائِكَتِي وَأُعَرِّفُهُ السِّرَّ الَّذِي سَتَرْتُهُ عَنْ خَلْقِي»

"I will love him when he loves Me and I will make him loved by My creation and I will open up his inward eyes to My glory and grandeur and I will not hide from him knowledge of the select of My creation. So in the darkness of night and in the light of day, I will tell him secrets, so that his conversations with creatures and with his companions will be cut off. I will make him hear My words and the words of My angels and I will reveal to him the secret I have hidden from the creation."(2)

H) Eternal happiness: Besides the above mentioned results, there are many things reserved for these people until the Day of judgement. We briefly discussed the infinite rewards in the last chapter. So we finish this discussion with one verse of the Glorious Qur'an.

﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ﴾

(1) *Usul al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, pp. 352 & 353.
(2) *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 77, pp. 28 & 29.

> *"Allah has promised to the believing men and the believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual abode, and best of all is Allah's goodly pleasure. That is the grand achievement." (9:72)*

Please, pay attention to the phrase: "best of all is Allah's goodly pleasure"! The highest level to which a man or woman can reach is to know that Allah, the source of all goods and the Lord of all the universe, is pleased with him or her.

How to Reach Our Goal

Having understood our ultimate goal it is necessary for us in our journey to discuss the way to that goal. This topic needs an independent book. But here we shall try to review briefly the most important points assured that our readers who take their lives seriously will follow this journey through further studying and reflection.

Before anything we should pay attention to two points: **(a)** We should observe our goal constantly during our lives, day and night; otherwise we cannot utilize our power for our aim and the ordinary affairs will capture our attention and gradually it may make us doubtful about the necessity of following that aim. It is all too common for human beings who are not successful in their pre-decided program to try to get rid of their difficulties through a denial of that program. **(b)** We should pray and ask Allah seriously to help and save us. We cannot continue this spiritual journey without His special help. Yes, with His help there will be no obstacle and nothing can stop us. So in the relationship with Allah we should not feel self-sufficient, because we are completely and absolutely dependent on Him. However in the

relationship with others we should trust ourselves and rely on our powers without allowing despair to capture our hearts. The Prophet (S) who was the bravest man and stood against all enemies and was able to change the world said:

«اِلٰهی لا تَکِلْنِی اِلیٰ نَفْسِی طَرْفَةَ عَیْنٍ اَبَداً»

"O My God! Do not ever leave me by myself even for an instant."(1)

Let us listen to Imam Sajjad (A.S.) when he asks Allah for help:

«سُبْحانَکَ ما اَضْیَقَ الطُّرُقَ عَلیٰ مَنْ لَمْ تَکُنْ دَلیلَهُ وَما اَوْضَحَ الْحَقَّ عِنْدَ مَنْ هَدَیْتَهُ سَبیلَهُ اِلٰهی فَاسْلُکْ بِنا سُبُلَ الْوُصُولِ اِلَیْکَ وَسَیِّرْنا فی اَقْرَبِ الطُّرُقِ لِلْوُفُودِ عَلَیْکَ قَرِّبْ عَلَیْنَا الْبَعیدَ وَسَهِّلْ عَلَیْنا الْعَسیرَ الشَّدیدَ وَاَلْحِقْنا بِعِبادِکَ الَّذینَ هُمْ بِالْبِدارِ اِلَیْکَ یُسارِعُونَ وَبابَکَ عَلَی الدَّوامِ یَطْرُقُونَ وَاِیّاکَ فِی اللَّیْلِ وَالنَّهارِ یَعْبُدُونَ وَهُمْ مِنْ هَیْبَتِکَ مُشْفِقُونَ اَلَّذینَ صَفَّیْتَ لَهُمُ الْمَشارِبَ وَبَلَّغْتَهُمُ الرَّغائِبَ وَاَنْجَحْتَ لَهُمُ الْمَطالِبَ وَقَضَیْتَ لَهُمْ مِنْ فَضْلِکَ الْمَآرِبَ وَمَلَأْتَ لَهُمْ ضَمائِرَهُمْ مِنْ حُبِّکَ وَرَوَّیْتَهُمْ مِنْ صافی شُرْبِکَ»

"Glory be to Thee! How narrow are the paths for him whom Thou has not guided! How plain the truth for him whom Thou hast guided on his way! My God, so make us travel on the roads that arrive at Thee and set us into motion on the paths nearest to reaching You! Make near for us the far, and make easy for us the hard and difficult! Join us to

(1) *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 86, p. 9.

Thy servants, those who hurry to You swiftly, knock constantly at Your door, and worship You by night and day, while they remain apprehensive in awe of You! You have purified their drinking places, taken them to the objects of their desire, granted their requests, accomplished their wishes through Your bounty, filled their minds with Your love, and quenched their thirst with Your pure drink."(1)

The right path towards our happiness is worship, servitude. Allah says:

﴿أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ وَأَنِ اعْبُدُونِي هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ﴾

"Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you should not serve the shaytan? Surely he is your open enemy, and that you should serve Me; this is the right path." (36:60 & 61)

The prophet Jesus (A.S.) also told the children of Israel:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ﴾

"Surely Allah is my Lord and your Lord, therefore serve Him, this is the right path." (3:51)

Worship does not necessarily mean special kinds of worshipping. Every action or even thought which is done for Allah's pleasure is considered as a worship. The worship in this broad sense is able to occupy all our life. Our works or jobs, our speaking or listening, our eating or drinking and even our sleeping can be for His pleasure and can be helpful

(1) *The Psalms of Islam*, pp. 245 & 246.

in our spiritual movement.

We studied during our discussion about the goal of the creation that human beings are created to worship Him and that it is to their own benefits. We knew that there was a hierarchy of goals and we understood the place of worship as one goal within the hierarchy.

If we want to worship Him and get close to Him, it is not enough to practice some prayers or fastings and the like. It changes all aspects of our being. First of all, we should know Allah and His religion. Secondly, we should obey those laws (act according those laws). Thirdly, we should make our characters and spiritual qualities as He pleases. Thus, there are three realms of improvement: creeds, deeds and virtues.

What should we do in respect to our creeds? According to Islam every person is asked to investigate religion. One should think, reflect, study and discuss religion. Some religious beliefs are necessary for all people, such as the main principles and some are not necessary for all people. So it is not necessary nor expected, that every person must know all the details about, say, the resurrection through personal investigation.

To make an inquiry into religious beliefs one should first of all depend on one's reason. After realizing the truth of the religion or the Prophet (S) one can use the guidance of the Glorious Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet for further studies. Moreover the Prophet (S) has wanted all Muslims to refer to his household for understanding the real interpretation of the Glorious Qur'an and his pure tradition. The Prophet said:

«تَرَكْتُ فِيكُمُ ٱلثَّقَلَيْنِ مَا إِنْ تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدِى أَبَداً:

كِتَابَ اللهِ وَعِتْرَتِي أَهْلَ بَيْتِي وَلَنْ يَفْتَرِقَا حَتَّىٰ يَرِدَا عَلَيَّ الْحَوْضَ فَانْظُرُوا كَيْفَ تَخْلُفُونِي فِيهِمَا»

"I leave two precious things among you that by grasping them you will never go astray after me : the Divine book and my Household. And they will never separate from each other until they come to me near the fountain (kawthar). Be careful how you behave with them after me."

This tradition is one of the traditions which expresses the authority of the Household of the Prophet in presenting pure Islam. Here is a list of books recording this tradition, but we should note that these are just some samples of Sunni scholars' works and there are many other books by Shi'i and Sunni scholars which include this tradition: *Sahih* of Muslim, (Vol. 8, p. 25, No. 2408); *Sunan* of al-Darimi (Vol. 2, p. 432); *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhi (Vol.5, p. 6432, No. 3788); *Khasa'is* by Imam Nesa'i (p. 21); *Musnad* by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (Vol. 3, p. 388, No. 10720); *Kanz al-'Ummal* (Vol. 1, p. 44); *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* by Ibn Sa'd (Vol. 2, p. 194); *Jami' al-Usul* by Ibn Athir Vol. 1, p. 187; *Al-Jami' al-Saghir* by Al-Suyuti, (Vol. 1, p.353); *Usd al-Ghabah* by Ibn Athir (Vol. 2, p.13); *Tarikh al-Dimashq* by Ibn 'Asakir, (Vol.5, p.436) and *Al-Tafsir* by Ibn Kathir (Vol. 4, p.113).

We should take care of our beliefs: basic ones and derivative ones. If a person is not expert or skilled in discovering Islamic thoughts and concepts through the Glorious Qur'an or the traditions he must not interpret them according to his desires or weak understanding and he must not rely on those people who are not of sufficient

knowledge and expertise. To use their books or sayings is like taking medicine according to the prescriptions of false physicians. Thus, understanding the details of the beliefs is like understanding practical laws.

According to Islam our happiness is not only based on our faith or beliefs. Deeds as well as virtues bear on our happiness. Islamic practical laws are to guide us in the realm of actions especially when our intellect or conscience is uncertain.

Every person can learn jurisprudence and the related sciences and become a *mujtahid*. Then he can rely on his own understanding of the laws. But it is a difficult process and needs much cleverness, a lot of work and practice. Those who are not prepared for this (job) have two other possibilities. They can exercise precaution. For example, when they are in doubt about whether something is obligatory or recommended they must do it, or when they do not know whether something is forbidden or allowed they must not do it. To behave in this way is very difficult and even impossible for those who are not learned in jurisprudence. The second possibility is to imitate or follow a person who is proved to be a *mujtahid* or the most learned and at the same time just, trustworthy, insightful and the like. This kind of reference, i.e., the reference of a non-learned to a trustworthy and learned person is advised by reason and approved by Islam. This is what we do in our daily life, e.g., we take the prescription of our physician or we ask some architect to make a plan for our house and so on.

There are also social duties for us especially in the present situation of the Islamic world. If we want to have

respect in this universe and rewards in the other it is not enough to perform our personal duties. Another role of that insightful, learned and just *mujtahid* is to declare the duties of the Muslims. Our intellect tells us that through obedience to this authority we can guarantee our material and spiritual happiness. Let's quote what Allamah Muhammad Rida al-Muzaffar has written in his precious book *Aqa'id al-Imamiyah*:

> *"We believe that a fully qualified mujatahid is a representative of the Imam, in the case of the latter's absence. Thus, he is an authority over Muslims and performs the functions of the Imam as regards judgement and administration among the people...*
> *Therefore the qualified mujtahid is not only one who issues fatwas, but he also has general authority over Muslims who must consult him if they require judgement, this being obtainable only from him. It is correspondingly wrong for anyone to give judgement except him or one who is appointed by him, as no one can pass sentence without his permission."*(1)

After understanding our duties through *ijtihad* or *taqlid* (imitation) we should try our best to perform them. The first step is to perform the obligatory ones. If a person disobeys the obligatory duties he stops his movement towards Allah and even goes downwards. The second step is to perform the recommended affairs (*mustahabbat*).(2)

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(1) *The Faith of Shi'a Islam*, p. 4.

(2) Please read the tradition on *nawafil* in the pervious chapter again.

Besides the performance of obligations we should take care of our spiritual qualities. This topic is studied in ethics, *akhlaq*. To speak briefly, first of all we should recognize our bad qualities. Then we should try to get rid of them. In this way we can clean and purify our spirits and make our hearts capable of receiving divine illuminations. Besides general ways there are some special ways to treat moral weaknesses particular to each of them.(1) This process should be accompanied with acquiring good attributes and virtue.

These are outlines of the Islamic program for human beings to reach their happiness. We hope that the reader will follow these points by him or herself. It's nice to finish our discussion with two traditions of the Prophet (S):

«أَكْثَرُ مٰا تَلِجُ بِهِ أُمَّتِيَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ تَقْوَى ٱللهِ وَحُسْنُ ٱلْخُلْقِ [يَعْمُرٰانِ ٱلدِّيٰارَ وَيَزِيدٰانِ فِي ٱلْأَعْمٰارِ]»

"Most of my people enter Paradise through piety and good behaviour. They improve cities and lengthen lives."(2)

«بُعِثْتُ لِأُتَمِّمَ مَكٰارِمَ ٱلْأَخْلاٰقِ»

"I have been sent to complete noble characters."(3)

(1) For a good discussion about different schools in morality and the Qur'anic one refer to *Al-mizan Fi Tafsir al-Quran* by Allamah Tabataba'i on the verses 2:153-157.

(2) *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 71, p. 375, No. 6.

(3) *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 70, p. 372, No. 18.

Appendix

A Glance at Islamic Punishment and Its Philosophy

Islamic punishments are amongst those Islamic concepts which are sometimes misunderstood by non-Muslims and considered incompatible with human values. It is asked why some human beings should be executed for their crimes or why Muslims flog some criminals or how we can consider a certain punishment forever and for all conditions.

To understand the philosophy of the Islamic system of punishment we should notice the following points:

I) According to our previous discussions, human beings are not at the same level and in spite of their common body or shape they are of different realities or natures. That is why some are worse than animals and some might be more valuable than angels.

II) According to our previous discussions, any sin or crime is really an oppression to both the agent and the victim. Sins are considered as diseases or sicknesses which are harmful to the sick and might be infectious, so others

are endangered and the sick must be cured by using some medicine or operation. Who can prescribe some medicine or advise an operation? The answer is obvious. It can be decided only by one who knows the different kinds of disease and ways to cure each of them and has exact information about the sick person to diagnose his sickness. Any mistake might lead to the death of that person and the spread of the disease in society.

III) One of the most influential ways to encourage people to take care of their health is to make them aware of the difficulties and pains of the process of treatment such as injection or operation or expenditure.

IV) Allah, the Creator of the universe and of human beings, knows different types of sins and their effects upon the individual and the society and the best way to meet any problem better than anyone else. Also, Allah is the Compassionate, the Beneficent. He loves His creatures more than anyone else. He loves each individual even more than his parents.

V) Some punishments in Islam are decided by Allah for all environments and all conditions. These fixed punishemnts are called *'hudud'* (حدود). Some punishemnts are up to judges' decisions. These punishments which vary in different conditions are called discretionary punishments or *'ta'zirat'* (تعزيرات). For example the penalty which is to be considered for traffic crimes or for some illegal actions in offices might be different. The amount and type of the punishment depend on social conditions and the range of the spread of the sin and so on.

Thus, some sins are very dangerous and social conditions have no effect on their evil or bad effects. But some sins are not at that level and their effects depend on social

conditions This is just like human needs which are divided into two groups: some needs are so basic that nothing can remove them such as the need for food or to worship, and some are derivative and can be denied or met in different ways. The fixed practical laws of Islam are to address the former and temporary practical laws which are defined by a '*mujtahid*' according to general rules are to address the latter.

VI) While a criminal is being punished, other members of the society must not allow pity for that person detain them; otherwise the crimes in the society will increase just like a disease. If a baby needs ten injections, his or her mother should not ask the doctor to prescribe only five injections, because with this foolish pity the baby will suffer the pain of the injections without any benefit and he or she might lose his or her life and other children of that family or other families might become sick. We can see some of these points in the following verse.

﴿اَلزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ وَلاَ تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ وَلْيَشْهَدْ عَذَابَهُمَا طَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

"(As for) the fornicatress and fornicator, flog each of them, (giving) a hundred stripes, and let not pity for them detain you in the matter of obedience to Allah, if you believe in Allah and the last day, and let a party of believers witness their chastisement." (24:2)

We can see in this verse that Islamic punishment is necessary to be carried out and if we believe in Allah and the non-material universe and facts we should know that Divine solutions for social and individual problems are the

best, and we should not let pity detain us and prevent us from treating social diseases. Also it is necessary for the punishment of these people to be a lesson for all.

Another example about punishment decided by God is found in these verses.

﴿وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱعْتَدَوْا مِنكُمْ فِى ٱلسَّبْتِ فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُوا قِرَدَةً خَاسِئِينَ فَجَعَلْنَاهَا نَكَالاً لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهَا وَ مَا خَلْفَهَا وَمَوْعِظَةً لِلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

"And certainly you have known those among you who have exceeded the limits of the Saturdays, so We said to them: Be (as) apes, despised and hated. So we made them an example to those who witnessed it and those who came after it, and an admonition to those who guard (against evil)." (2:65 & 66)

The Bani Israel were obliged to refrain from working on Saturdays. In order to test them, Allah used to send a lot of fish in the river on Saturdays as their main work was fishing. So what they did was to prevent the fishes from swimming away and therefore they would be able to fish on Sundays. Allah punished them and made them in shape of apes. The above verses say that the punishment was because of their disobedience and it was also a lesson for the pious (just like the people who witness the chastisement of the fornicator and fornicatress or hear it).

So, in conclusion, we can say that Islamic punishments are to prevent further crimes and save the people and to purify the criminal.